

**VILLAGE TRADE  
UNIONS IN TWO  
CENTURIES**

**E. SELLEY**

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VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS  
IN TWO CENTURIES



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# Village Trade Unions in Two Centuries

By

Ernest Selley



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## PREFACE

I WISH to record my obligation to Mr. A. W. Ashby and Mr. L. M. Marshall for their helpful criticisms and suggestions, and also to express my gratitude to Mr. George Dallas, of *The Workers' Union*, and Mr. R. B. Walker, of the *National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union*, who have willingly placed at my disposal the facts relating to the growth of their respective organizations.

E. S.

LONDON, *July* 1919.



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NINETEENTH CENTURY





# Village Trade Unions in Two Centuries

## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST UNION

*"How beggarly appear arguments before a defiant deed!"*

THE first English Agricultural Labourers' Union was formed in 1833 at Tolpuddle, an obscure village in Dorsetshire. It existed only a few months, and was a complete failure. Had it not been for the senseless brutality of the Government, the story of this little Union might never have been recorded. Yet the story of the "Dorchester Labourers" is a well-known episode of early Trade Union History. It was a time of great agricultural distress, and it is doubtful whether even a well-organized, powerful combination could have succeeded by direct action in raising the standard of living among farm labourers. There was a sufficient "reserve of labour" to break the back of the most powerfully

organized Union. Thousands of starving unemployed labourers were ready to work for even less than seven shillings a week, which was the sum the Tolpuddle farmers were paying. Small wonder, then, that this tiny Union with no funds failed in its objects. Let alone, it would have uttered its valiant protest and disappeared. The Union men thus defeated and turned adrift might have acquired local celebrity as wicked men who richly deserved the fate which had befallen them. And the clergyman from his pulpit might occasionally have held them up as examples of what would certainly happen to all those with a tendency to be dissatisfied with the dispensations of Providence. Doubtless this fame was not denied them; but they gained even greater celebrity. They became national bogies. Half a dozen untutored agricultural labourers frightened a powerful Government out of its wits. A wave of panic swept the seats of the mighty. *The Times* wrote of a "dangerous union," "that criminal and fearful spirit of combination." Members of Parliament thought it "abominable" that labourers should "unite to persecute their employers." Poor, down-trodden labourers, earning seven shillings a week, had become "criminal," "fearful," and "abominable," because they thought they ought to have more than seven shillings a week, and said so. These utterances show how little the ruling classes understood the distress of the times. Hitherto, unrest in the country districts had made itself known by means of arson.

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“ In the winter (1830-1),” writes Engels, “ the farmers’ hay and corn stacks were burnt in the fields, and the very barns and stables under their windows. Nearly every night a couple of such fires blazed up, and spread terror among the farmers and landlords. The offenders were rarely discovered, and the workers attributed the incendiarism to a mythical person whom they named ‘ Swing ’.”

E. G. Wakefield, M.P., in a pamphlet entitled *Swing Unmasked* (1830), thus describes the lot of the agricultural labourer :—

“ An English agricultural labourer and an English pauper—these words are synonymous. His father was a pauper and his mother’s milk contained no nourishment. From his earliest childhood he had bad food, and only half enough to still his hunger, and even yet he undergoes the pangs of unsatisfied hunger almost all the time that he is not asleep. . . . His wretched existence is brief; rheumatism and asthma bring him to the workhouse, where he will draw his last breath without a single pleasant recollection, and will make room for another luckless wretch to live and die as he has done.”

Such was the general condition of farm labourers when the Trade Union standard was first raised by the bold peasants of Tolpuddle. The story of how the Union came to be formed is told by George Loveless, a Methodist lay preacher, who was the local “ village Hampden.” It was in 1831 or 1832 that the men first voiced their discontent.

They met the farmers in the presence of the parson and asked to be paid the same wages as other farmers in the district were paying, which was said to be 10s. a week. It was mutually agreed

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that the wages should be 9s. a week. "No language of intimidation or threatening was used on this occasion." However, the farmers did not keep their side of the bargain, for shortly after the wages were reduced to 8s.

"This," says Loveless, "caused great dissatisfaction, and all the labouring men in the village, with the exception of two or three invalids, made application to a neighbouring magistrate . . . and asked his advice: he told us that if the labourers would appoint two or three, and come to the County Hall the following Saturday, he would apprise the chief magistrate, and at the same time our employers should be sent for to settle the subject. I was nominated to appear, and when there, we were told that we must work for what our employers thought fit to give us, as there was no law to compel masters to give any fixed sum."

Wages were reduced to seven shillings a week, and the men were told that shortly they would have to be content with six! Then, and not till then, did the men think of forming a Union. Loveless thus describes how it came about:—

"The labouring men consulted together what had better be done, as they knew it was impossible to live honestly on such scanty means. I had seen at different times accounts of Trade Societies; I told them of this, and they willingly consented to form a Friendly Society among the labourers, having sufficiently learned that it would be vain to seek redress either of employers, magistrates, or parsons. I enquired of a brother to get information how to proceed, and shortly after, two delegates from a Trade Society paid us a visit, formed a Friendly Society among the labourers, and gave us directions how to proceed."



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This was in October 1833.

The ritual and code of rules adopted were similar to those in use among the many branches of the "Grand National Consolidated Trades Union," which were springing up everywhere in the towns and cities. The farm labourers were simply taking a leaf out of the town artisan's book. Many of the rules were quaint, but it must be remembered that those were the very early days of Trade Unions. All the Trade Unions of that day administered an oath of secrecy, and possessed some sort of regalia. The Tolpuddle branch had a figure of "Death painted six feet high" with which to perform the rites of initiation. There was to be an Outside and Inside Guardian, and the Password was to be changed every quarter.

The lawful intention of the Union is proved by Rule 23 :—

"That the object of this Society can never be promoted by any act or acts of violence, but, on the contrary, all such proceedings must tend to injure and destroy the Society itself. This Order, therefore, will not countenance any violation of the Laws."

Lodge meetings were evidently run on strict business lines, for one of the bye-laws directed that no member should be "allowed to eat, read, sleep, swear, bet wagers, or use any absurd language during Lodge hours." This wholesome rule might, with advantage, be adopted to-day by both Houses of Parliament.

The oath of secrecy and the ritual may appear

humorous to many in these days, but no farm labourer dared to let it be known that he had anything to do with a Trade Union. However, in spite of their elaborate precautions, the Tolpuddle Unionists were unable to keep Judas outside.

Nothing happened until the Union had been in existence for four months, when, on February 21, 1834, placards were posted in conspicuous places, warning the labourers that membership of the Union was a crime to be punished by seven years' transportation. As yet the Union had issued no manifesto, made no claim, uttered no threat. Yet within three days of the publication of this warning, James Loveless, George Loveless, Thomas Stanfield, John Stanfield, James Hammett, and James Brine, "evil-disposed persons," were arrested and thrown into jail.

Mr. Sidney Webb, in his *History of Trades Unions*, says: "The trial of these unfortunate labourers was a scandalous perversion of the law." The laws against combination had been repealed in 1824; therefore it was not illegal to form an association having for its object the raising of wages. So an old statute intended for the suppression of seditious societies was specially invoked, and the six prisoners, after a brief and farcical trial, received a sentence of seven years' transportation for the crime of having administered an oath!

Referring to this episode, Sir Spencer Walpole writes:—

"The statute had been rarely enforced: practically it had been disregarded by every Trade Union in the

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Kingdom. It was suddenly resuscitated to punish the men who had formed the first Agricultural Union."

Daniel O'Connell, speaking in the House of Commons, said :—

" It was a slumbering statute, and had not been carried into effect against the many associations who took the oath. . . . Only now raked up to inflict an enormous punishment on unfortunate men who were wholly ignorant of its existence and innocent of any moral offence."

*The Times* (April 1, 1834) summed up the case exactly :—

" All Freemasons and Orangemen . . . might with equal justice be sentenced to transportation for the fact of having taken secret and unlawful oaths as these poor fellows. . . . In the case of the Dorchester labourers the formal charge against them was that of administering and being bound by secret, and therefore unlawful, oaths : whereas the real gravamen of their guilt was their forming a dangerous union, to force up, by various modes of intimidation and restraint, the rate of labourers' wages."

But after remarking that the sentence was " too severe " (March 21, 1834), it naïvely added : " But it may be useful if it spreads alarm among those more acute and powerful disturbers of the town populations throughout England."

Edward Bulwer (afterwards Lord Lytton), Mr. Hume, and others uttered strong protests in Parliament, and condemned the undue haste with which the men were hurried off to the hulks before the general expression of public sympathy could

have any effect in their favour. The judge who tried the case had only recently been raised to the bench. It took him two days to decide whether he could pass sentence on the accused. Notwithstanding the many protests uttered inside and outside Parliament, there were not lacking those who supported the brutal sentence. Lord Melbourne agreed that "the law has in this case been most properly applied." But it was reserved to the noble Lord Howick, from his seat in the House of Commons, to utter the most pitiful nonsense. He tried to prove that the labourers knew that they were doing wrong: for (and here one can almost feel the shudder which shook the chamber) *did not they hold their meetings at night?*

While awaiting trial attempts were made to get the men to turn informers, but they steadfastly refused. They also received attention from the prison chaplain.

"After upbraiding and taunting us with being discontented and idle, and wishing to ruin our masters, he proceeded to tell us that we were better off than our masters."

At the trial:—

"Our characters were investigated from our infancy. . . . Our masters were enquired of to know if we were not idle, or attended public-houses, or some other fault in us; and much as they were opposed to us, they had common honesty enough to declare that we were good labouring servants, and that they never heard of any complaint against us."

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Daniel O'Connell, in the House of Commons, read a letter from a solicitor who was present at the trial, in which it was stated:—

“ This evidence was given in a very loose and indistinct manner and varied very materially from the depositions of the same witnesses taken before the County magistrates. On the principal point, the taking of an oath, the witnesses stated that they could not recollect what was said. The Counsel for the Prosecution in vain endeavoured to elicit such answers as would have supported the indictment; and such answers as were at last drawn from them with great difficulty, were suggested to them in the form of leading questions, by the judge reading from the depositions.”

After sentence was passed, and as the prisoners were being led away, James Loveless scribbled some verses on a piece of paper and threw it among the crowd.

This is one of the verses:—

“ God is our guide ! no swords we draw,  
We kindle not war's battle fires ;  
By reason, union, justice, law,  
We claim the birthright of our sires.  
We raise the watchword liberty,  
We will, we will, we will be free ! ”

But the matter was not allowed to rest. Public meetings of protest were held all over the country. Within seven days of the trial William Cobbett presented at the bar of the House of Commons a petition signed by twelve thousand persons in London.



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Meanwhile the whole of the Trade Union movement threw itself into the task of organizing a monster procession to present a petition. The petition was signed by over 250,000 persons. The Government became alarmed. Troops were hurried to London and special constables sworn in. But they were not required. The demonstrators were quite orderly. The Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, refused to receive any deputations or petitions from the processionists. Nevertheless they marched through London and held a demonstration in Copenhagen Fields. Accounts vary as to the numbers taking part in the procession. The Trade Unions declared that from one hundred thousand to two hundred thousand were present.

Edward Bulwer, in the House, referred to the "countless thousands who swept the streets of the metropolis in such orderly and formidable procession." Whatever the exact figure might have been, the demonstration was of a monster size. Nothing like it had ever been witnessed in London before. It was the first of the great demonstrations which have since become a popular method of influencing politics.

The Government refused to recant, and the men were sent to Botany Bay. However, a body of workmen, known as the *London Dorchester Committee*, kept up the agitation for release, and collected £1,300 on behalf of the victims. After two years' unceasing agitation they succeeded in inducing the same Government that banished the men to issue a pardon. The funds collected

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enabled the committee eventually to place five of the men and their families on small farms in Essex, and to return the sixth to his native place. George Loveless eventually emigrated to Canada, and in 1873 was reported to be "in very prosperous circumstances."

"This cruel abuse of judicial power," says Hasbach, "only comprehensible in view of the dread which had been aroused by the Trade Unions, kept the labourers from advancing along this road through one of the saddest periods of their history."

## CHAPTER II

### THE INTERVAL

*"Has the night descended?"*

*Was the road of late so toilsome, did we stop discouraged  
nodding on our way?"*

WELL might Mr. Jesse Collings write:—

"The story of the English agricultural labourer is one of the saddest in our history . . . no pen can exaggerate their sufferings and the lowness of their condition. . . . In all but the name they were worse off than serfs of olden times, for serfs, though slaves, had plenty of food, generally land to cultivate, and dwellings which they regarded practically as their own."

In earlier times the landless labourer was the exception. Men who worked entirely for wages were a comparatively small class. Between them and the farmer was a large class of men who enjoyed a certain amount of independence. They divided their time in varying proportions between work for the farmer and work for themselves. The farmer was dependent upon their assistance during the busy seasons, and the men were glad to work for the farmer at such seasons, and also to earn

money by occasional day-work. In addition, the labourer's income was often increased by the industry of his wife and family. Before the Factory System was introduced, many industries were carried on in the homes. The Industrial Revolution changed all that. And the Enclosures practically swept the small-holder out of existence. He became dependent solely upon wages.

The relations of farmer and labourer were now on a different footing. Formerly their interests were mutual; in good seasons they shared prosperity together; in bad ones they were partners in misfortune. Now, in times of depression, the day-workers were turned adrift to starve. Landless, wretched, inarticulate, they had not the energy to help themselves. They struggled on beneath the heavy yoke of oppression without the knowledge or the imagination which would have made them free.

"Swing" and his tinder-box commenced once again to speak the "loud though inarticulate language" of which Carlyle wrote. Frederick Engels, in 1844, said: "Since that year (1831) the incendiarisms have been repeated every winter, with each recurring unemployed season of the agricultural labourers." Moreover, quoting from the *Northern Star*, 1843-44, he says:—

"November 25, 1843, two cases; several earlier ones are discussed. December 16th, in Bedfordshire, general excitement for a fortnight past in consequence of frequent incendiarisms, of which several take place every night. Two great farmhouses burnt down within the last few

days ; in Cambridgeshire four great farmhouses, Hertfordshire one, and besides these, fifteen other incendiarisms in different districts. December 30th, in Norfolk one, Suffolk two, Essex two, Cheshire one, Lancashire one, Derby, Lincoln and the South twelve. January 6, 1844, in all ten. January 13th, seven. January 20th, four incendiarisms. From this time forward, three or four incendiarisms per week are reported, and not as formerly until the spring only, but far into July and August. And that crimes of this sort are expected to increase in the approaching hard season of 1844-45, the English papers already indicate."

The flaring ricks and smouldering barns were beacon fires flashing out messages which few could interpret, certainly no one in the agricultural districts. They were signals of distress from ~~a~~ sullen, despairing ~~peasantry~~. *London labourer*

The boom in industrial prosperity which took place in the thirties eased the situation for a great many farm labourers. Many migrated to the towns, while others left the land to become navvies on the railways, which began to be constructed all over the country. Many, too, who remained on the land, worked on the railways during the winter months.

Wages in agriculture generally did not improve. Three years after the Union had been suppressed, when the agricultural situation had improved, the *average* wage for Dorset was 7s. 6d. a week, and in only two counties in the West Midland and South-Western area did wages average 10s. a week. Between 1837 and 1850 cash wages fell in every part of England, in the West Midlands and



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South-Western division from 8s. 10d. to 7s. 2d. a week.<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that these figures represented the *average*. Therefore, while some labourers were receiving more than 7s. 2d. a week, many, especially in Devon and Dorset, were receiving less.

After 1850 wages gradually rose, until, in 1870, the average for England was 12s. 4½d. In addition to his cash wage, the labourer in some cases received allowances and perquisites, such as a free or low-rented cottage, a strip of potato ground, fuel, and beer or cider. The value of such allowances varied in different districts. In some parishes the ordinary labourer received nothing but his wage. In North Devon, in 1866, according to Canon Girdlestone, the ordinary labourer received no privileges whatever. Thus in thirty-three years the average weekly wage for England had risen by 2s. In some districts the increase was very slight. In Norfolk *average* wages had only risen 1d. a week since 1837, and stood at 10s. 5d. in 1870. Wages in Suffolk rose 6d. a week during the same period. Colour is given to these statistics by the evidence before the Royal Commission, which reported in 1867. The commissioner for Dorset, Kent, Chester, Salop, Staffordshire, and Rutland reported that in all six counties the greater number of agricultural labourers were sadly underfed.

In order to subsist, whole families had to work in the fields. One of the great abuses of the period 1830-67 was the exploitation of the labour of

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I.

women and children. By 1843 it was the exception to find a district where they were not employed in agricultural work. A man's attempt to increase his family income by means of the labour of his wife and children brought that labour into competition with his own. The result was that the total family income was rarely above subsistence level. Children of tender years were forced to work in the fields, and boys of nine, and even seven, and girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen, found constant employment at stone-picking, bird-scaring, potato-setting, and weeding. Women were usually employed in weeding and hoeing, but in some districts they might be found acting as carters, and doing other work usually performed by men. It became customary for men and women and children to work in gangs, tramping from place to place in charge of gang-masters, who entered into contracts with farmers for the performance of field work. This rough, nomadic life deprived the children of their scant opportunities for education, and subjected them to much physical hardship. Women and girls worked alongside men in the fields, and, when distance prevented them from tramping to and from their homes, they were compelled to lodge promiscuously in barns and outhouses. The result was grave moral deterioration. Speaking of the gang system, Joseph Arch says:—

“ There was no limit as to age, and I have seen little mites of things in potato fields who were hardly old enough to walk ; and I have seen poor little toddlers set to turnip-

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singling when they should have been indoors with their mother."

In 1843 Special Commissioners appointed by the Poor Law Commission reported on the serious consequences of the system, but it was not until 1867 that the *Gangs Act* was passed. This Act provided for the separation of the sexes into their own gangs, and forbade the employment of children under eight years of age.

In those days thousands of farm labourers' children were deprived of opportunities of education. If a lad attended school at all, the circumstances of the family often made it necessary for him to be taken away at an early age in order to augment the family income. The country-side acquiesced, for education was considered the privilege of the farmer, the tradespeople, and the gentry. The farm labourer needed only strong arms, not active brains. The schools that existed in the villages were mostly voluntary, and dominated by the clergy. It was not thought necessary to give a village child the opportunity of acquiring more than a few scraps of rudimentary knowledge. An imperfect acquaintance with the "three R's" was considered enough, provided the child could recite the Creed, the Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. At Leamington in 1872, at the first farm labourers' conference, an old man who rose to speak said: "All as ever I larnt were the Creed, the Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, an' I war thout fit to go thru the world, tho' I didna

know what any on 'em meant, ony the letter loike." Speaker after speaker prefaced his observations with the apology: "I hav'n't no larnin'." "I never had no schoolin' as I knows on."

Many farm labourers, rather than see their families starve, stole turnips and potatoes from the farmers' fields, or knocked over a pheasant or a hare. And though they might starve and retain their honour and liberty, if distress drove them to steal turnips or poach for game they became criminals, and, if caught, were sent to prison. To be caught taking game a second time meant seven years' transportation! The pheasant could rob a farmer's field and be protected by a set of the most ferocious laws which ever disgraced a civilized country, but the labourer had no protection against those who robbed him of the reward of his labour.

Mr. George Edwards to this day vividly recalls the sufferings of the farm labourers during the Crimean war. Bread was 4s. a stone, and the price of meat prohibitive. Many families literally starved. The alternative was to steal. His own father was caught bringing home turnips for his starving family. For this "crime" he was sent to prison for fourteen days. While the father was in prison the mother and family had to go to the workhouse.

Those who remained honest were tamed into servitude—a servitude more degrading than any the penal laws could inflict. Years of poverty had ground the spirit of independence out of most of these poor helots. They had learnt by experience

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to accept their lot as they did the rectory soup and blankets, with resignation. No doubt alms were doled out by kindly people who imagined they were performing acts of Christian service, and who, in many cases, were not themselves rich in this world's goods. But they had not learnt that a certain type of charity degrades the one who gives as much as the one who receives.

The Royal Commission which reported in 1867 regarded his cottage as almost the worst feature of the labourer's lot. Fraser, afterwards Bishop of Manchester, stated that in his district "the majority of the cottages that exist in rural parishes are deficient in almost every requisite that should constitute a home for a Christian family in a civilized community." Many were compelled to live in their masters' cottages. They were afraid to complain aloud of their misery, or even to beg for any alleviation. To offend the master, in most cases, meant being turned out into the road. Independence was not likely to thrive under such conditions.

Overcrowding was common, families of eight and ten living in cottages with only one, or at most two, bedrooms. Many of the dwellings were dilapidated and insanitary—veritable hotbeds of disease and death. In such hovels as these the labourer lived on sufferance. There he might exist, worse treated than the cattle. Let him rise for one moment above the level of the brute, and he would soon be shown that it was dangerous to play the part of a human being—by being turned adrift, perhaps to starve.

Mr. Francis Heath, in his book *The English Peasantry*, writing of this period, said :—

“ Everything was against them [the labourers]. Badly housed in most cases, living sometimes in miserable hovels unfit for the accommodation of cattle, and leading in consequence a life of semi-starvation, insufficiently clothed, and subjected frequently to the brutal ill-treatment of employers, how could they raise themselves from their unfortunate position? Even the law would not always afford them protection against injustice.”

Canon Girdlestone, writing of a village in North Devon, says he found the “ general sanitary conditions *very bad*. Numbers of the labourers’ cottages unfit for the housing of pigs. Pools of stagnant water standing in different parts of the parish, varied occasionally by stinking ditches. Heaps of manure thrown up under the windows of many of the dwelling-houses. The whole village was badly drained; open sewers running through the place, frequently trickling down from the cottage into the brook, from which the villagers and children often drank, and cattle too. Result, disease and death.”

What, then, was the farm labourer to do? He had no prospects whatsoever, and to talk of thrift was a mockery. How could a man earning 10s. a week with a family to feed and clothe put by for a rainy day? People talk of thrift as though the exercise of it is only proved by showing a balance at the end of the year. These labourers and their wives already exercised thrift in its most extreme and vicious form, and after half starving



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themselves and their children all the year round, generally found themselves in debt with the village shopkeeper. The necessity for such thrift was a standing disgrace for a nation that was increasing its wealth by leaps and bounds every year, and to the class of farmers who were more prosperous than English farmers had ever been. The populace which cheered the soldiers returning from the Crimea and the Mutiny ignored the conditions of the villages from which the army had been largely recruited.

In many a rural poorhouse were parents whose sons had died for the honour of Britain, outside Sebastopol or under a tropical sun. Such was the prospect of thousands of English farm labourers. The proper place for the worn-out veterans of the soil was the poorhouse. At the end of many laborious years they were doomed to submit to the indignities of a pauper's lot.

"Nothin', genelman!" said an aged labourer at the first Leamington Conference in 1872, "arter havin' kep' one's character, and braat—naay *dragged*—up large families, as is doin' creditable; arter havin' kep' un off the parish; arter havin' lived days un days on a bit o' bread wi' maybe a little hedge fruit, or the matter o' a ra' turnip—nothin' to fall back on but half a crown a week and a loaf! and the country be so rich! Why, we be waarse off then the convicks. Ween dun our best, an' now as weer old an' can do no more, we've fourpence a day an' a loaf onct a week."

Sometimes a newspaper correspondent would provide a sensation for his readers by a graphic



account of conditions in remote villages. In 1846 *The Times* sent a special correspondent to Dorsetshire to report on the "shocking conditions," and the *Morning Chronicle* published letters in 1849 which described the labourers' pitiful case. This was good "copy," but it brought the labourers no relief. At one time the *Daily Telegraph* collected funds through its columns and distributed them among distressed labourers.

On a moonlight night in January 1846 "a thousand half-clad and nearly wholly starving peasantry met in a lane at Goatacre, Wiltshire, to make known their wretchedness to the Queen." A thrill of horror ran through the drawing-rooms; sentiment was quickened—that was all. Nothing was done to improve the lot of the labourer. The great mass of town-dwellers were too engrossed in the gains and losses of an expanding commercialism to realize poignantly the hopeless conditions of the agricultural labourer. As for the philanthropist, he was usually busy diagnosing the city slum. True, the labourers did not complain aloud. Too many of them had wearily acquiesced in the theory which was perpetually preached to them—that their condition was ordained by Providence. They had not even the energy or the desire to help themselves. The soul of the labourer was in danger of perishing through lack of vision.

## CHAPTER III

### THE REVOLT

*"My call is the call of battle ; I nourish active rebellion."*

CANON GIRDLESTONE in 1863 was transferred from a Lancashire village, where the labourers were well paid and properly nourished, to the village of Halberton, in North Devon. In a letter to Mr. Francis Heath, the Canon wrote :—

"In North Devon as a rule, with, of course, certain exceptions on the estates of philanthropic owners, wages are for labourers 8s. or 9s. a week, with two or one-and-a-half quarts of cider daily, valued at 2s. per week, but much over-valued. Carters and shepherds get 1s. a week more, or else a cottage rent free. The labourer has no privileges whatever. He rents his potato-ground at a high rate. Though fuel is *said* to be given to him, he *really* pays its full value by grubbing-up for it in old hedges in after-hours. In wet weather or in sickness his wages entirely cease, so that he seldom makes a full week. The cottages, as a rule, are not fit to house pigs in. The labourer breakfasts on tea-kettle broth—hot water poured on bread and flavoured with onions ; dines on bread and hard cheese at 2d. a pound, with cider very washy and sour, and sups on potatoes or cabbage greased with a tiny bit of fat bacon. He seldom more than sees

or smells butcher's meat. He is long-lived, but in the prime of life 'crippled up,' i.e. disabled by rheumatism, the result of wet clothes, with no fire to dry them by for use next morning, poor living, and sour cider. Then he has to work for 4s. or 5s. per week, supplemented scantily from the rates, and, at last, to come for the rest of his life on the rates altogether. Such is, I will not call it the life, but the existence or vegetation of the Devon peasant. He can hardly keep body and soul together."

Canon Girdlestone tried to persuade the farmers to treat the labourers better, but in vain. One Sunday morning, in March 1866, at a time when a cattle plague was raging, he delivered a sermon in Halberton Church, taking for his text: "*Behold the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle.*" He asked the farmers "if they did not think that God had sent the plague as a judgment upon them for the manner in which they treated their labourers, to whom they had been accustomed to give less consideration than to their cattle."

The sermon raised a great outcry in the parish. Abuse was heaped upon the Canon by the farmers, and the clergy and gentry of the neighbourhood completely boycotted him and his family. As Professor Thorold Rogers wrote:—

"Mr. Girdlestone had the ordinary fate of those who attack the doings of the landed interest. His better-behaved opponents denied the accuracy of his statements, and published their own account of the facts. His rougher critics, the farmers, threatened him with violence and the horse-pond. It is not quite clear that his poor clients thought him their kindest friend in letting the world know what was their condition."

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The Canon wrote a letter to *The Times* describing the conditions in North Devon. As a result he was overwhelmed with letters from all parts of England and Ireland offering to provide good wages and comfortable homes for labourers. This showed him that the way to raise wages in North Devon was to reduce the supply of labour. Therefore in 1866 he set to work to arrange for the migration of many of the labourers into districts where labour was scarce.

The farmers of Halberton went mad. They threatened to refrain from church attendance, in fact to close down the church, to prevent the singing of the choir, the playing of the organ, and the ringing of the bells. Some, not in a spirit of worship, attended the Wesleyan Chapel. Here, however, they were confronted by another man who was not afraid of them: they were told to go back to their own church!

Between 1866 and 1872 some four or five hundred men, two-thirds of them with families, were sent away by the direct instrumentality of Canon Girdlestone to Lancashire, Yorkshire, Kent, Sussex, and various parts of the British Isles. The men left 8s. a week to obtain from 13s. to 22s. a week with cottage and garden free. With few exceptions all who went away prospered, and many procured situations for their former neighbours.

The work of Canon Girdlestone had the effect of awakening the labourers in the neighbouring counties of Dorset, Wiltshire, and Somerset, and

migration commenced in these counties also. The dry bones were beginning to stir. Other influences which sprang up during the period showed the new spirit which was abroad in the country-side. Labourers commenced to join societies, such as the Oddfellows, and in some districts co-operative societies were formed. Although little improvement was effected in the labourer's position by these means, yet they gave him vision and taught him to combine for definite ends. Here and there, in isolated districts, Labourers' Unions were formed for the purpose of raising wages, but, generally speaking, they failed in their object.

In 1866 an *Agricultural Labourers' Protection Association* was formed in Kent, "to organize the agricultural labourers with a view to the amelioration of their social conditions and moral elevation, and to endeavour to mitigate the evils of their serfdom." As labour was scarce, wages were raised without much difficulty, but higher wages had the effect of checking migration, and the result was that the farmers were able to reduce wages. Agricultural Labourers' Unions were formed in Buckinghamshire, Herefordshire, and Hertfordshire for the purpose of raising wages. The Herefordshire Union was formed in 1871. Its watchword was "Emigration, Migration, but not Strikes." It had its origin in the village of Leintwardine, and was supported by the Rector. So successful were its operations, that in less than a year it had spread into six counties, and its membership amounted to about thirty thousand. Through its instrumen-

tality the surplus labour was sent into Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Staffordshire, where the wages were six or seven shillings a week higher. The result was that in a very short time wages in Herefordshire rose on an average two shillings a week, and the improvement extended to the neighbouring counties. This was the largest combined effort which had yet taken place. The *Lincolnshire Labourers' League* was formed in May 1871, though little was heard of its activities until a year later.

Great events often turn on the tiniest hinges. In February 1872 two or three labourers at Weston-under-Weatherly, in Warwickshire, wrote a letter to a local newspaper, in which they described the intolerable conditions under which they had to live. Some labourers in Charlcote, near Wellesbourne, happened to read it, and were stirred into action. They held a meeting at Wellesbourne, and one of their number addressed it. One of them had worked in the Black Country, where he gained some knowledge of Trade Unions and their practices. It was decided to form a combination. The men made no secret of their action, and the news spread quickly from village to village. They looked around for a leader. The man they selected was Joseph Arch, a farm labourer and lay preacher, who lived in the neighbouring village of Barford, and who had gained a local reputation as an orator and a champion of his class.

It was arranged to have another meeting under the chestnut-tree at Wellesbourne. Joseph Arch set out for the meeting "dressed in a pair of cord



trousers, and cord vest, and an old flannel jacket." The fate of the Dorsetshire labourers rose to his mind. He knew that, if possible, the law would be used to ensnare him, and that every opportunity would be taken to ruin him and make his life unbearable. The scales of justice were not likely to be held evenly in the hands of a magistracy of landlords and clergy. How could a handful of half-starved agricultural labourers fight against prejudice, privilege, and oppression?

Since the morning, the news that a meeting was to be held at Wellesbourne had spread like wild-fire. No handbills, no posters, no paragraphs had advertised the meeting. From mouth to mouth the news had spread. The shepherds and horsemen carried the glad tidings from village to village.

By the time Arch arrived over a thousand persons had gathered on the village green at Wellesbourne. This was the best testimony to the spontaneity of the movement. The Duke of Marlborough some weeks later described it as one which had been brought about by "paid agitators" who were seeking only their own mean ends, and who had succeeded in disturbing "the friendly feeling which used to unite the labourer and his employer in mutual feelings of generosity and confidence."

Francis Heath says that it had been arranged to hold the meeting in a large room at the inn, but long before the hour fixed the room was filled to overflowing. So they adjourned to the village green. A pig-killing board was brought out and placed beneath a chestnut-tree; Arch mounted the



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board and addressed the meeting. He spoke for an hour amid breathless silence, and at the conclusion of the speech a resolution was passed to form a Union. Between two and three hundred men joined there and then. The meeting was reported in the *Leamington Chronicle*, and thus from the first the movement became advertised in the Press. A fortnight later another meeting was held under the chestnut-tree, and the crowd was even larger than before. The result was more accessions to the Union.

Early in March the small committee which had been appointed drew up the following letter, which was served upon all the farmers in the neighbourhood of Wellesbourne :—

“ SIR,—We jointly and severally request your attention to the following requirements—namely, 2s. 8d. per day for our labour ; hours from six to five ; and to close at three on Saturday ; and 4d. an hour overtime. Hoping you will give this your fair and honest consideration.”

The farmers, however, treated the letter with silent contempt. They imagined that the labourers would soon repent their temerity. On the following Saturday, when the men went for their money, they found the farmers obdurate. So they decided to come out on strike. Two hundred labourers struck work. Some farmers came to terms, but the majority of them refused to attempt a compromise and resorted to coercive measures, in some cases evicting the labourers and their families from their homes.

Farmers did not pause to discover whether the labourer had any legitimate grievance. They could only see red. As Mr. Jesse Collings says,

“For these men—these hereditary bondsmen—to assume the right to make terms, or to strike, created as much astonishment and resentment in his (the farmer’s) mind as if the horses on his farm had assumed the like.”

When the farmers realized that the labourers were not prepared to give in, they declared that if the men would not bend, they should be broken. Landowners as well as farmers victimized Union men. One made his agent serve notices on all his cottage tenants who belonged to the Union.

“In numerous cases,” says Jesse Collings, “labourers had the brutal choice put before them either to give up the Union or quit their employment, and be ejected from their cottages. Respectable industrious men, who had dwelt in cottages for many years and had paid their rents regularly, were turned out at a week’s notice for refusal to leave the Union.”

*The Times* (March 25, 1872) wrote :—

“The farmers are beginning to retaliate on the Union, which they are determined to extinguish. As a body, the farmers are resolutely opposed to the Union, which they regard as a most dangerous confederation. Some have already discharged all their labourers who have joined the Union, and other Unionists are under notice to leave.”

Arch was denounced as a “paid agitator” and an “apostle of arson.”

At the *Midland Farmers’ Club* the following

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resolution was carried against an amendment in favour of arranging a conference between the representatives of the landowners, the tenant farmers, and the labourers (*Birmingham Daily Gazette*, April 5, 1872):—

“That this meeting desires by every legitimate means to ameliorate the condition of the agricultural labourer, but will by any and every means resist the interference of designing political agitators, who seek, for their own selfish purposes, to sow dissension between employer and employed in the agricultural districts of the Midland Counties.”

The voting on this resolution was even, and it was declared carried by the Chairman's casting vote. This indicates that at least half the farmers were prepared to act in a reasonable manner. Had the Chairman's vote been cast the other way, History might have taken a very different course.

The labourers, however, were firm, and public sympathy was with them. Matthew Vincent, the editor of the *Leamington Chronicle*, who from the first was a warm supporter of the Union, advertised the strike. When the news filtered through to London, the *Daily News* sent down its famous War Correspondent, Archibald Forbes. His articles reached a wider public than that of the *Leamington* paper, and the revolt of this handful of labourers was watched by the whole nation.

In *The Times* (March 18, 1872), a week after the commencement of the strike, it was stated that

“the strike among the agricultural labourers in South Warwickshire is assuming a very serious aspect. . . .

Meanwhile the labourers receive a vast amount of popular support, and every post brings letters of sympathy and assistance from various parts of the country."

On Good Friday—six weeks after the commencement of the strike—a great demonstration and inaugural meeting was held at Leamington. The labourers with their wives and children, headed by their village drum and fife bands, marched into Leamington singing:—

"The farm labourers of South Warwickshire,  
Have not had a rise for many a year,  
Although bread has often been dear,  
But now they've found a Union."

The organizing Committee met during the afternoon in order to draw up the rules and to appoint the officers. The name given to the Union was the *Warwickshire Agricultural Labourers' Union*. Joseph Arch was elected organizing secretary, and Henry Taylor, a carpenter, became secretary. At the evening meeting, attended by "several thousand labourers," the chair was taken by Auberon Herbert, M.P., and he was supported by Sir Baldwin Leighton, Mr. E. Jenkins, M.P., Dr. Langford of Birmingham, and Mr. Jesse Collings. An anonymous donation of £100 was received towards the Union funds. Accompanying the cheque was a message: "*The right to form the Union must be fought for to the death.*" The audience took up the battle-cry, and shouted it in unison.

Appeals for funds were sent out to the Trade Unions, to all members of Parliament, and others.

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In a few days cheques ranging from £50 to £100 began to flow in. Had it not been for this outside help the Union would have collapsed. It would have been impossible for men, many of whom were in debt when the strike began, to have held out for long against the coercion of the farmers and the insidious charity of the squires and clergy.

Some idea of the rapid growth of the Union may be gathered from the fact that in less than three weeks after the Wellesbourne men went on strike, sixty-four branches had been established, with a membership of five thousand.

The success of the Warwickshire Union encouraged farm labourers in other parts of the country to combine. Unions were formed in Kent, Gloucestershire Dorset, Devon, Worcestershire, and Norfolk. Unionism spread like an epidemic. In the Midlands an attempt was made to form the farm labourers of Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, and Shropshire into a Union of thirty thousand members.

Joseph Arch and his helpers received messages from all parts of the country asking them to start Branch Unions. It was therefore necessary to think out a scheme of organization for the whole country.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NATIONAL

*"For we cannot tarry here ;  
We must march, my darlings, we must bear the brunt of  
danger."*

IN 1868, at the meeting of the *British Association* at Norwich, Canon Girdlestone stated that nothing short of combination would effect any improvement in the deplorable condition of the peasantry. The time had now arrived for the realization of this idea on a National scale. In a letter, dated April 27, 1872, the Warwickshire Committee invited the numerous smaller Unions to join in the formation of a National Union.

On May 29th a congress met at Leamington for this purpose. There were present eighty representatives from twenty-six counties, all of whom were *bona-fide* farm labourers. Mr. G. Dixon, M.P. for Birmingham, presided, and among the supporters on the platform were Mr. Jesse Collings, Sir Baldwin Leighton, Mr. J. A. Langford, Mr. Hodgson Pratt, and other influential persons. Letters of sympathy were received from Professor



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Fawcett, M.P., Lord Edward Fitzmaurice, M.P., Canon Girdlestone, and others.

It was decided to form a National Union "in each county or division of county, and that the National Agricultural Labourers' Union shall consist of representatives elected by such district Unions." The Executive Committee was to consist of twelve farm labourers, a chairman, and a secretary, elected annually by congress. Joseph Arch was elected chairman, and Henry Taylor secretary. It was also decided to form a committee of "gentlemen favourable to the principles of the *National Agricultural Labourers' Union*." This committee was invited to attend the weekly meetings of the Executive, and to assist by consultation and advice, but with no power to vote. Mr. J. E. M. Vincent, editor of the *Leamington Chronicle*, was elected treasurer. Messrs. Jesse Collings, E. Jenkins, A. Arnold, and W. G. Ward were appointed trustees. The entrance fee was fixed at 6d. and the contribution at 2d. per week.

The Advisory Committee was composed of sympathetic outsiders. There is no doubt that this Advisory Committee had much to do with the drafting of the general rules. The following statement, signed by the Chairman, was circularized with the rules, April 27th :—

" These rules are not regarded by the National Executive as exhaustive, but simply as fundamental. It is felt that Districts and Branches should have perfect liberty to frame such laws for their own guidance as their own special circumstances may suggest ; that liberty is freely



accorded, and the National Executive hope it will be exercised on the basis of the rules for Districts and Branches, and in harmony with the General Rules of the National. . . . Let courtesy, fairness and firmness characterize all our demands. Act cautiously and advisedly, that no act may have to be repented or repudiated. Do not strike unless all other means fail you. Try all other means ; try them with firmness and patience ; try them in the enforcement of only just claims ; and if they all fail then strike."

The immediate aim was declared to be "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work," nine and a half hours, exclusive of mealtimes, as a day's work, and 16s. as a week's pay.

The general objects of the National Union were : (1) "To improve the general condition of agricultural labourers in the United Kingdom." (2) "To encourage the formation of Branch and District Unions." (3) "To promote co-operation and communication between the Unions already in existence."

By this time there were several other Unions not connected with the Warwickshire movement. Some were in existence before the Warwickshire Union ; others, inspired, no doubt, by Arch and his followers, had been formed independently. The "National," however, was not successful in effecting the combination of all the Unions. Several, notably the *Lincolnshire Labourers' League*, stood aloof.

The "National" Committee put on record the following resolution :—

"The Committee believe in the justice and righteousness of their cause, and have the firmest faith that Divine blessing will rest upon it."

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The Congress was marked by unbounded enthusiasm, and had all the characteristics of a religious revival. This is largely explained by the fact that many delegates were Methodist preachers. At times the conference bore a strong resemblance to a Methodist "love feast." In homely language, these rough, unlettered men told of their sufferings, their struggles, and their aspirations. The speeches were punctuated with cries of "Amen," "Praise Him," and other devout utterances. The gentlemen on the platform were variously referred to as "Honoured surs," "These yere worthy gents," "These raal genelmen," etc. The audience was alternately moved to laughter and tears. One delegate said: "Sir, this be a blessed day: this ere Union be the Moses to lead us poor men up out o' Egypt"; and another delegate commenced his speech with this explanation given in a confidential tone: "Genelmen and b'luv'd Crissen friends, I's a man, I is, hes goes about wi' a oss." Another informed the assembly that "King Daavid sed as ow the 'usbanman as labourers must be the fust partaker o' the fruit," adding, "and now he's mo'astly th' last, and loike enuff gets none at all." Yet another, descanting on the ways of Providence, remarked that "little things was often chus to du graat ones, and when e sa' the poor labrin' man comin' furrud in this ere movement, and a bringin' o' the faarmers to terms, he were remoinded o' many things in th' Scripters, more perticler o' th' ram's horns that blew down the walls o' Jericho, and frightened Pharaoh, King of Egypt."

Professor Thorold Rogers paid a high compliment to these peasant preachers. He wrote :—

“ I do not believe that the mass of peasants could have been moved at all had it not been for the organization of the Primitive Methodists, a religious system which, as far as I have seen its working, has done more good with scanty means, and perhaps, in some persons' eyes, with grotesque appliances for devotion, than any other religious agency. I have often found that the whole character of a country parish has been changed for the better by the efforts of those rustic missionaries.”

On the second day of the Congress various subjects were discussed, which shows that the advisers of the Union, the politicians, were anxious that its efforts should not be confined to the mere question of hours and wages. Henry Taylor, the secretary, spoke on Trade Unionism, Sir Baldwin Leighton, Bart., on allotments and cow-pastures, Jesse Collings on education for the agricultural labourer, the Hon. and Rev. J. Wentworth Leigh on co-operative farming, and Mr. H. Brooks on the cultivation of waste lands. At the end of the speech by Jesse Collings the following resolution was passed :—

“ That in the opinion of this meeting a national compulsory system of education is absolutely necessary for the advancement of the social position of the agricultural labourer.”

The support given to the Union by these gentlemen is undoubted, but it is nevertheless clear that many of them had pet schemes for reform which they were anxious for the Union to foster. Arch

did not deny that these reforms might have a beneficial effect on the labourers eventually, but he said : " To raise the wages, shorten the hours, and make a free man out of a land-tied slave, is *my* last, and to that last I'll stick."

The success of the Union was beginning to have an effect on the farmers. The formation of a National Union convinced many of them that the labourers were going to fight to a finish. The Warwickshire farmers convened a special meeting at Warwick. The Earl of Denbigh was present, and advised the farmers to confer with the labourers with a view to a settlement. At first their proposition was that the labourers should send some delegates to a conference. This was declined by the labourers. The Union was asked to appoint three representatives to meet three landowners and three farmers. The Union replied that—

" in view of the present incomplete state of the formation of the Agricultural Labourers' Union, this meeting is of opinion that the proposal should be postponed for the present."

It was clear that the farmers meant business for shortly afterwards they had another county meeting. Finally they proposed that three representatives of the Union should meet the Chairman and two other members of the *Chamber of Agriculture*. This offer was accepted by the men, and Arch and two others were appointed to meet the farmers' representatives. In a letter to the Union the Chamber deprecated the farmers' resolution

which had been placarded about the country, threatening to evict all Union men. They also advocated piece-work, and denounced the system of payment in kind.

" This practice of paying wages in kind prevents a just estimate of the value received by the labourer, induces unreasonable demands on the part of the employer, affords facilities for impositions by unscrupulous employers, leads to improvident habits, and increases intemperance."

This spirit of reasonableness was a good sign, and proved that the Union was making itself felt. Some farmers had conceded the Union terms, but the majority of them refused for some time to give in. Many offered 15s., but the Union stood out for the figure which had originally been fixed as the minimum. The Union succeeded eventually in obtaining the 16s., which represented an all-round rise of 2s. a week in Warwickshire.

In all parts wages were rising by two or three shillings a week.<sup>1</sup> Migration had a good deal to do with this. Many of the men who had been discharged had migrated to other localities. Some went into the cotton mills, some on the railways, and a few emigrated to New Zealand.

There was a shortage of agricultural labour in the North, and men could obtain wages of £1 a week with extras in counties like Northumberland. The influence of the Union extended even into Northumberland, for in *The Times* (April 6, 1872) we read that at the annual hiring of farm hands in

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I.

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Northumberland "the farmers exhibited a disposition to give higher wages rather than reduce the hours to a fixed scale; the majority of the hinds, however, stood out for a day's work of nine hours, overtime at 6d. per hour, and a half-holiday every fortnight; Sundays to be paid for. Several of the best hands were hired upon these terms with an advance of 2s. and 3s. per week wages. The wages are about £1 a week with privileges."

The labourers had good reason to congratulate themselves on the strength of their Union. In less than three months it had grown into a national movement, with a membership of nearly 50,000, and within a year the number of members exceeded 70,000. In June 1872 a weekly journal, entitled *The Labourers' Union Chronicle*, was started, with Mr. J. E. Matthew Vincent as its editor. Its full title was *The Labourers' Union Chronicle; An Independent Advocate of the British Toilers' Rights to Free Land, Freedom from Priestcraft, and from the Tyranny of Capital*. Other papers were started in Lincolnshire and Kent, but were purely local, and ran only for a short time. Although the editor of the *Chronicle* was the treasurer of the Union, the paper had no official connection with the Union; it was "a private venture." It was used by the Union for notices, reports of meetings, and propaganda work, but its policy was not controlled by the Union. Its sub-title proclaimed its policy to be much wider in scope than the original aims of the Union. In 1873 (June 7th), in a long article, the *Chronicle's* aims were declared to be:



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(1) Higher Wages ; (2) The Franchise ; (3) Land Nationalization ; (4) Probate Duties on Land.

The *Chronicle* had a great influence on the movement in its early stages, and did much to educate the labourer in the political, economic, social, and agricultural questions of the day. Many labourers learnt to read in order to be able to read its pages. In 1873 its circulation reached 35,000, and was rising "more than a thousand a month."

"It is no uncommon thing," says Clayden, "to see half a dozen labourers sitting under a hedge at their mid-day meal listening to a seventh who is reading from its pages."



## CHAPTER V

### OPPOSITION

*"He going with me goes often with spare diet, poverty, angry enemies, desertions."*

IT is hard to understand why this movement should have been attacked with so much bitterness by the very people who should have welcomed it as a regenerating force, promoting both justice and brotherhood. Had it been accompanied by crime, lawlessness, and disorder, they might have been excused for holding aloof, or even for hostility. Even in that case, indeed, there should have been men in England with enough enthusiasm to put all the wisdom they possessed at the service of the movement. The movement, however, was perfectly law-abiding: the agricultural labourer had become articulate without the aid of fire or anarchy. He saw in union and co-operation an instrument which would make him free. He used this instrument to protest against his servitude, and to rise out of it. From the beginning the movement was characterized by a complete absence of the avenging spirit. The labourer was willing to forget the

centuries of wrong, even to forgive recent wrongs in his desire for present justice and future opportunity. Clayden wrote in 1872 :—

“ A singular moderation has characterized the movement from the first. No instance of a vindictive spirit has stained its history. Men have been again and again turned out of home and work for no other cause than identification with the Union. Justices of the Peace, lay and clerical, have dealt out to them a merciless justice, and in not a few cases even the very letter of the law, as well as its spirit, has been nearly, if not quite, violated at the bidding of a relentless detestation of the movement. . . . A thousand indignities have been heaped upon both the Union and its disciples, but there has been no wilful retaliation, no agrarian outrage, no loss brought home to an employer's door.”

There is no doubt that the influence of Joseph Arch was responsible for the moderation with which the movement voiced its claims. Mr. Jesse Collings says that, in those days, “ Arch's influence over the men was unbounded, and they would have gone in any direction he wished them to go.” The Rev. Attenborough, a Congregational minister, who from the first publicly supported the movement, said : “ He (Arch) has but to urge vengeance, and night after night flaring stacks will illumine the darkness, and the whole country will be laid waste.” Many more testimonials of a similar nature could be quoted from the writings of public men and the contemporary Press.

Yet, in spite of this, the bulk of the clergy and cultured classes described Arch as an “ apostle of arson,” a “ paid agitator,” and poured upon

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him and upon the Union all the bitterness which could possibly emanate from intelligences poisoned by prejudices. The Bishop of Gloucester (Dr. Ellicott) presided at a farmers' dinner, and, referring to the Unionists, reminded his hearers of an old saying, "*Don't nail their ears to the pump, and don't duck them in the horse-pond.*" He did not in so many words advocate ducking in the horse-pond, but the real meaning of his hint was not disguised by the mere ambiguity of words. This unfortunate speech must afterwards have caused the Bishop much uneasiness. It received the publicity it deserved. In the *Spectator* (September 6, 1873) it was referred to in the following terms: "Dr. Ellicott whose five minutes' speech will within five years turn the Bishops out of the House of Lords." Here was a Bishop going out of his way to besmirch his sacred office, while, on the other hand, an avowed sceptic like Charles Bradlaugh was publicly supporting the down-trodden labourers.

No one knew better than the country clergy the intolerable conditions under which the agricultural labourer had to live, yet, instead of aiding him in his struggle, they, for the most part, sided with the farmers and landowners, or remained indifferent.

"The country clergy of the day," says Mr. Jesse Collings, "who knew so well the starving condition of the labourers, unfortunately missed a great opportunity of showing sympathy with them in their legitimate efforts to help themselves. The great majority of the clergy stood aloof from the movement altogether, but a large number of them showed a bitter hostility to it."

Rightly or wrongly, the labourers looked to the Church for sympathy in their struggle for justice, but they looked in vain. Well might Dr. Gore, the Bishop of Oxford, ask in 1913,

“ Why did not the Church of England years ago appear manifestly before the country, telling what it knew about the housing conditions and the conditions of wages of the agricultural labourers? Why, when Mr. Arch was in the field forty years ago, did not the Church stand out and say: ‘ This is the merest claim of justice ’ ? ”

One of his predecessors, speaking at the Church Congress in 1873, while the attitude of the clergy towards the Union was being discussed, reminded the clergy that whilst refraining from interference with the miserable wages, they should impress on the labourers the necessity of leading virtuous lives and attending the ordinances of religion!

The position of the country clergymen was not an easy one. Many of them, though kindly and conscientious, were utterly unsuited to arbitrate between employers and labourers, and, as Thorold Rogers aptly puts it,

“ When the former are farmers and the latter are hinds, I generally found that the clergy put a personal interpretation on the apostle’s advice, *and seek to live peaceably with all men.*”

Most of them regarded the labourer’s lot as part of the permanent order of things, and caught at any subterfuge, or any excuse, for resisting change. “ Setting class against class,” “ destroying the good relations,” were among their stock phrases.

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They never paused to enquire whether the "good" were *just* relations. Discontent, however caused, was mischievous. It upset the tranquil equanimity of parochial patronage. As Goldwin Smith put it in a speech before the Trade Union Congress at Sheffield,

"He did not deny that the parish clergyman dispensed a good deal of charity in the villages, but he argued that the kindness is usually such as tends to keep a man *contented with a more or less wretched position*, and not that more enlightened and truer kindness which helps him to help himself. . . . There is nothing which squires or parsons as a whole have striven less to do than to make the labourers *permanently independent* of their bounty."

Much evidence could be produced to show how bitter was the hostility of many of the clergy. The churchwarden at Clopton, in Suffolk, issued a notice that "the society calling itself the *National Agricultural Labourers' Union* having ordered strikes in a portion of the county of Suffolk, all members of the same in this parish have notice to give up their allotments, and will be struck off the list of parochial and bread charities." In a parish in Buckinghamshire two young women were turned out of the choir because they spoke at labourers' meetings; in Suffolk the clergyman threatened to turn an old woman out of her allotment if she allowed her barn to be used for a meeting of the labourers. The pages of the *Chronicle* abound with cases as flagrant as the above. These were petty acts of oppression which, but for the *Chronicle*, would most likely have remained unrecorded.

But one act of shameful persecution which occurred at Chipping Norton immediately gained the publicity it deserved. A small strike was in progress at Ascott-under-Wychwood, in Oxfordshire. One of the farmers procured two men from a neighbouring village to come over and act as "scabs." The wives of the men on strike marched out to meet these two men, and sought by pleading and then by ridicule to deter them from taking the bread out of their mouths. Some of the women carried sticks, but the only blows struck were what Arch described as "tongue blows." There might have been some hustling. As a last resort the women invited the two men to "come back to the village public-house and have a drink." The men, however, were not to be cajoled, and went to work for the farmer under police protection. Yet the farmer prosecuted the women for "intimidation," and seventeen of them, some of them young wives with babies in arms, were brought before the county magistrates.

The presiding magistrates were two clergymen. The evidence showed that there had been no physical violence, a fact to which the two "scab" labourers testified. The Union representative was present with a sum of money to pay the fine, if such should be imposed. Imagine the astonishment and consternation when the clerical magistrates after much consultation, found sixteen of the women guilty, and sentenced seven to ten days' and nine to seven days' hard labour!



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The Union delegate said that, had he not been present, violence would have been committed in court. The people were infuriated. In the evening a riot broke out, and was quelled with much difficulty. The Press took up the matter, and unanimously condemned the sentences. *The Times* declared that the action of the magistrates was "extremely harsh and singularly ill-advised. Such a sentence staggered the poor women, and well it might, for it staggered the whole country." Is it any wonder that the labourers started to advocate Disestablishment, and the abolition of the clerical magistracy, when on the one hand as receivers of tithes, the clergy, in the main, sided with the landowner, and on the other, as magistrates they dealt out "left-handed justice" to the labourers?

Much bitterness was caused by the Chipping Norton case. This incident was an extreme instance of the manner in which the clerical magistrates up and down the country treated Union offenders. Mr. Jesse Collings, speaking at the second annual conference, advised the labourers

"that if they were ever brought before the magistrates they should try and choose the day, if they could, when there was no clergyman on the bench. Although he had lived all his life in the country, and had had many opportunities for observing the administration of justice, he had never known a lenient sentence, nor anything short of the rigour of the law, come from a clergyman."

While the women were in prison an appeal was issued to the public for subscriptions. Over eighty

pounds were collected. On the day they were set free two brakes went to meet them, and headed by a band, and accompanied by thousands of people, the procession stopped at Ascott outside the house of the prosecuting farmer. There Arch made a present of five pounds to each of the women.

In spite of the flagrant injustice of the sentence there were found some who organized a counter-demonstration in support of the action of the clerical magistrates. *The Church Herald* also lent its columns to support the two clergymen. Thus, in its issue of June 11, 1873, the following passage occurs :—

“ It is clear to us that the two clerical magistrates who acted so properly deserve the hearty thanks of all order-loving people.”

A huge meeting was held at Chipping Norton the same evening, and nearly three thousand people gathered round the wagon from which Arch spoke. At the meeting resolutions were passed declaring for (1) the extension of the franchise ; (2) the repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act ; and (3) the appointment of stipendiary magistrates.

In justice it should be recorded that there were some noble exceptions among the clergy. Cardinal Manning (then Archbishop) openly sided with the men, and appeared on their platforms. The Bishop of Manchester, Canon Girdlestone, Rev. Attenborough, and others not only sympathized with, but helped the men. Others, less well known, but no less brave, subscribed to the funds, took the

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chair or spoke at meetings, or lent the church field for Union meetings. Such men were the salt of the English clergy.

Moreover, among the landowners and farmers there were those who, more enlightened than their fellows, saw the justice of the labourers' claim, and helped where they could. Some farmers, on their own initiative, raised wages, and some landowners reproved the farmers on their estates for the way they treated the labourers. But, in the main, both landowner and farmer were bitterly opposed to the Union, and did their utmost to stamp it out. Landlords of the type of the Duke of Marlborough assisted the farmers in every conceivable way in their endeavour to fight the Union. He it was who said the movement had destroyed the mutual feelings of confidence and generosity which formerly existed.

But did those mutual feelings really exist? As Francis Heath pointed out, "there was in most cases the confidence and frequently the cringing dependence of the labourer, without the generosity of the employer." Canon Girdlestone records some instances of employers' generosity which occurred before the Union was formed. The following is one: A carter saved a valuable team of horses which had taken fright. In doing so he fell, and the wheels of the wagon crushed his ribs. For two months he was confined to his bed. The farmer never paid him a penny the whole time, nor once went to see him. After the Union was started there were scarcely any limits to which some farmers

would not go in order to show their intense hatred of it. Turning the men out of their homes into the roads was a common practice. In one village the men asked their master for more wages, and he promptly dismissed them.

In a village in Berkshire an old paralysed man was turned out of his home because his son had joined the Union. The police were instructed by the landlord to evict the whole family from the cottage. They entered the cottage while the family were at their midday meal, and commenced to remove the furniture into the road, where it remained for nearly a week. The old man, his son and his wife and four children, were rendered homeless. They had refused to go because they held that as they paid their rent yearly they could not be turned out at a week's notice. Eventually, after the beds and furniture had been damaged by a thunderstorm, they were allowed to re-enter because the young man consented to withdraw from the Union.

On another estate the men asked for a rise from 12s. to 14s. a week. A meeting of farmers and landowners took place, with Lord Barrington in the chair. They decided to raise the wages by a shilling a week, and immediately sacked eight men, who migrated to Wales and earned 3s. 10d. a day. The farmers then began to turn out of their cottages the wives of the men who had been dismissed.

The Earl of Denbigh issued a letter to the tenants of the cottages on his estate, insisting that all such tenants should work for the farmers on the estate

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or leave. It was, perhaps, not an unreasonable request, but in his letter he wrote of the "paid agitator" who went about "deceiving the people as to their highest interests, and by fomenting a spirit of discontent, tried to dissever that bond of union between class and class which had hitherto been the bulwark of England's prosperity and happiness." Such was the attitude of several of the "good" landlords. They were not harsh; in the main they were kindly and considerate, but they wrote and talked a good deal of unconscious cant.

The bitterness of this period was not the work of demagogues and paid agitators, but of the farmers, clergy, and gentry. The simple fact was that neither landowners nor clergy appreciated the real significance of the movement, and the farmers could hardly be expected to be endowed with keener vision

## CHAPTER VI

### COLLAPSE

*"O baffled, balk'd, bent to the very earth."*

PERSECUTION and attempts at suppression appeared at first to bind the men together in closer unity. The Union seemed to be winning all along the line. Set-backs here and there were regarded only as temporary checks. Every new instance of tyranny only served to stir up indignation among the supporters of the Union. The men received moral and financial support from the general public. The industrial trade unions subscribed generously to the Union funds. Not only were grants made from the general funds, but every week subscriptions rolled in from collections made by the workers themselves in factories, mills, and mines. A glance through the columns of the *Labourers' Union Chronicle* reveals the spontaneity with which other workers contributed towards the farm labourers' fighting fund. In December 1872 a great meeting in support of the Union was held in Exeter Hall. Among those who publicly supported the Union on that occasion were Samuel



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Morley, Sir Charles Dilke, M.P., George Trevelyan, Sir John Bennett, Mr. Mundella, M.P., Archbishop Manning, T. Hughes, M.P. (author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*), and Charles Bradlaugh. Samuel Morley gave £500, and many of the others contributed handsomely at different times to the funds of the Union.

At the second Annual Conference held May 21, 1873, at Leamington, Mr. George Dixon, M.P., who presided, announced that 23 district unions, with 982 branches embracing 24 counties, had been established, with a total membership of 71,835. A year later there were 1,480 branches with 86,214 members enrolled. These figures do not represent the total number of men who had joined the Union. The number of men who joined, and for one reason or another allowed their membership to lapse, far exceeded the number at any one time on the Union's books. Some had fallen away as a result of persecution and intimidation, or, as the correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* said, "grew nervous, and withdrew their names." Others had migrated to Northern farms, while mines, railways, and factories continued to absorb large numbers.

From the first, even before the *National* was formed, migration had been a method regularly employed by the district unions. The men who went to the towns were lost to the Union ; likewise it must be assumed that most of those who migrated to the better-paid farms in the Northern districts, even if they continued to pay their subscriptions, were no longer active members of the Union. How-

ever, it soon became manifest that the North could not absorb all the men for whom the Union desired agricultural employment.

Within four months of the formation of the *National* emigration became an important part of its policy, and from that time onwards was "steadily and regularly organized by the Union authorities." The *Chronicle* consistently urged the labourers to emigrate. During the latter part of 1873 and in 1874 it laid emphasis on emigration. Its leading article, November 29, 1873, was headed "Labourers, Away to New Zealand." It concluded a leading article, January 17, 1874, with the exhortation "Away then, farm labourers, to New Zealand, Australia, and America! that is the only chance for you!" Columns were devoted to glowing letters from successful emigrants, and Arthur Clayden wrote articles urging the men to seek homes across the sea. The Executive of the Union frequently issued instructions to the district secretaries urging them to encourage emigration. When trouble occurred between farmers and men the Union could only offer to emigrate the men.

Arthur Clayden in his pamphlet *The English of the Pacific*, wrote:—

"In less than two years from the commencement of the 'revolt of the field' over 50,000 labourers were on their way to New Zealand, at a cost of more than a million pounds sterling to the Colonial Government."

No doubt a great many of these emigrants were Union men. It is not to be supposed that emigra-

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tion agents were active only among Union members ; but they advertised regularly in the *Chronicle*. Every week its readers could observe advertisements such as the following :—

“ QUEENSLAND.—If 30 wish to emigrate a free passage, and, if necessary, railway fare, will be provided. Where 300 wish to emigrate to Queensland from one district the Agent-General will lay on a special ship for their accommodation.”

Canadian emigration agents were also very active among the labourers. The Executive of the Union requested Arch to go over and view the country, and to bring back a report as to the prospects of those who emigrated. Arch was accompanied by Mr. Arthur Clayden—a member of the Consultative Committee of the Union. Assurance was given that the Canadian Government would see that the emigrants were properly looked after. A working arrangement was made between the Union and the emigration agents, and thousands of its members and their families were assisted to transfer their labour to Canada.

The enormous amount of migration and emigration carried on through the Union may be gathered from the fact that in the years 1873-4 over £6,000. was spent out of Union funds for these objects, and this was only a very small proportion of the total cost of transferring labour.

Speaking before the Agricultural Commission in 1881, Arch declared that during the first nine years of its existence, 1872-1881, the Union had been

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responsible for the emigration of 700,000 persons. If we take five as representing the average family, it will be seen that at least 140,000 labourers left England during those years. 140,000 would be a conservative estimate, because a large proportion of the 700,000 would be single men without families. Joseph Arch at first was opposed to emigration. As he says: "I only looked upon emigration as a disagreeable necessity, not as a thing to be recommended. I could not bear to see our best men pouring out of the mother-country when I knew we wanted them badly. . . . The drones and the aged were left to become a drag upon the Union funds." The Union was obviously weakened by the loss of so many of its best men, and many a village suffered from the absence of its stalwarts—the men who had kept alive the spirit of revolt.

The combined effect of the Union's activities resulted in a general rise of wages to the extent of an average of 2s. to 3s. a week in most agricultural districts. The *Chronicle* claimed that "since the Union began wages had increased from 1 to 4 and 5s. a week." Migration and emigration relieved many districts of their surplus labour, and even in districts where Union branches had not been formed, owing no doubt to the wide publicity given to the Union's activities, many farmers "with a kind of instinct" raised the wages of the men.

Although the Union had succeeded in raising wages, it had to exert all its energies in order to maintain them. There is no doubt that the Union's efforts lacked co-ordination and "generalship." The

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guerilla warfare that was carried on was not calculated to ensure anything more than temporary success. The Union's warfare of this period may be likened to a series of outpost engagements in which the men at one place, and the farmers at another, gained the advantage. In districts where the surplus labour had not been absorbed, farmers would resort to locking-out their men. In many districts farmers combined together to defeat the men. Thus we read in the *Chronicle*, May 10, 1873 :—

“ In Essex and Suffolk and elsewhere there is a tenant farmers' League to destroy the combination of the labourers, binding themselves to each other to refuse employment to all labourers in Union, and not to give more than 2s. for a 12-hour day. . . . 1,500 men are locked out. . . . The funds of the Union are going out £500 a week over the receipts to maintain these poor locked-out labourers.”

One method of strike-breaking adopted by the farmers at one time was promptly prohibited after representations had been made by the London Trades Council. During the harvests of 1872, when some of the men were on strike, the authorities allowed the military to assist in gathering the harvest. As the result of the protest by the London Trades Council a fresh regulation was issued explicitly prohibiting such assistance from being given by troops “ in cases where strikes or disputes between the farmers and their labourers exist.”

In February 1874 the Union suffered a severe shock. One of its Suffolk branches (Exning and

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Alderton) sent in a demand for a rise in wages from 13s. to 14s. a week, and the limitation of hours to a maximum of 54 per week. The farmers replied by locking out all the Union men. Other farmers followed their example, without waiting for the Union men to send in claims. The lock-out quickly spread to other counties. In less than a month lock-outs had taken place in five neighbouring counties, and also in Hampshire, Warwickshire, and Gloucestershire. By March 23rd 2,000 men were locked out—over 8,000 were out by the beginning of May. One authority estimated the total number of labourers forced into idleness at 10,000. A determined effort was made by the farmers to stamp out the Union.

The Union once more appealed to the organized trades and to the general public for funds; the men who were locked out in one district were sent on a march through England, holding demonstrations and collecting subscriptions. A special crusade through the manufacturing cities of the North brought in over £3,000. In Manchester a great demonstration took place, supported by the Bishop (Dr. Fraser), when 300,000 people joined in a procession through the city, and the street collections, "chiefly in pence," amounted to nearly £200. The industrial workers realized that low wages in the country had the effect of depressing urban conditions, since numbers of poorly paid farm labourers drifted into the towns and increased the competition for work.

The strain on the Union funds was tremendous.



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Thousands of men were in receipt of lock-out pay, and the cost of the migration of hundreds of them to other districts was borne by the Union. Emigration and migration could not cope with the situation ; as fast as men were removed from the relief lists, others came on, owing to fresh lock-outs. Attempts at conciliation generally failed. Only in Lincolnshire was a settlement effected. *The Lincolnshire Labour League* agreed to withdraw certain of its rules, and the farmers therefore recognized the men's right to unite.

But the farmers in other parts refused to come to terms. They felt that at last they had got the upper hand. They were not at the moment resisting claims for higher wages : they were simply conspiring to break up the men's combination. The Bishop of Manchester contributed an article to *The Times* (April 1874) entitled " Are the farmers of England going mad ? " To judge by the way in which they were neglecting the cultivation of the land, they were prepared to wreck the industry rather than abate their hostility to the Union. It is true that they had recourse to labour-saving machinery, and could limit their demand for labour by farming on a large scale. They drew upon the casual and unemployed labour of the towns and the Irish emigrants. In some districts they managed to keep things going by borrowing each other's men and employing women and girls. But such devices could not really make them independent of the skilled labour of the men who were locked-out, rather they emphasized the farmer's predicament.

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The collapse of the Union came in July 1874, when it was announced that the men who were locked out could no longer be supported. The funds were practically exhausted, and the Union had to tell the men to find work where and how they could.

It could not be said, however, that the farmers had won. Hasbach tells us that "the struggle ended without a decisive victory for either side. The labourers had not been fully united, neither had the farmers."

The enormous financial strain upon the Union may be gathered from the fact that in the financial year 1874-5 £21,365 had been paid out for strikes alone. Of this sum £5,595 was raised by special levies from the branches, and £12,613 from outside contributions. The Union suffered a serious decline in membership. During the following winter 112 branches ceased to exist, and the membership fell by about 28,000.

The effect of the collapse was to shake the confidence of the labourers. So long as the advance in wages was maintained, most of the men were confident that the Union could prevent them from falling again to their old level. Suspicion began to manifest itself in the ranks.

"It was easy," says Mr. Sidney Webb, "to drop into the suspicious mind of the uneducated villager a fatal doubt as to the real destination of the pennies which he was sending away to the far-off central treasury. . . . The clergyman, the doctor, and the village publican were always at hand to encourage distrust of the 'paid agitator.'"

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One of the unfortunate results of the lock-out was disunity within the Union ranks. Many became disheartened by the serious fall in membership, and began to lose faith in the Union as a means of improving the labourers' lot. Some argued that the funds should not be wasted on strikes and lock-outs, but should be utilized for the purchase of land, which could then be let out to Union members. An attempt was made to settle the question. Professor Newman, of Oxford, presided over a meeting which was composed of members and deserters. Considerable feeling was displayed at the meeting, and the confusion at the close was so great that its will could not be ascertained.

A new Union called *The National Farm Labourers' Union* was the result, having for its object the acquisition of land, which was to be purchased out of the weekly contributions and let out to members. Arch and his followers looked upon the new venture with scepticism, and opposed it with much bitterness. The new Union accomplished little beyond creating disunity. It managed in time to acquire some land, but eventually the whole project was abandoned.

Things were bad for the *National*, but the farmers were also in great distress. The great agricultural depression commenced in 1875. The rapid fall in prices, together with foreign competition, made farming unprofitable: Mr. R. E. Prothero writes of this period:—

“ For three years in succession, bleak springs and rainy summers produced short cereal crops of inferior quality,

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mildew in wheat, mould in hops, blight in other crops, disease in cattle, rot in sheep, throwing heavy lands into foul conditions, deteriorating the finer grasses of pastures. In 1875-6 the increasing volume of imports prevented prices from rising to compensate deficiencies in the yield of corn."

Rents on the whole were high, as many of them had been adjusted during the period when prices were booming. In some cases they were reduced or abatements were given, but as a rule this did not happen fast enough. Many farmers were ruined, while many more only held on by living on their capital. This reduced the number of workers engaged in agriculture, and those who remained were bound to accept low wages. The depression continued, and the Union could no longer keep up its membership, which had fallen to 24,000 in 1878 and to 20,000 in 1879-80. Lock-outs occurred every winter. Farmers did not wait for the men to make demands: they locked them out, especially if the men were in the Union.

Then came another split. Many of the members were afraid the Union was rapidly going under owing to bad management and extravagance. Their remedy was to group the district branches into Federal Unions in order to exercise greater control over the local branches. Arch was much opposed to the new scheme and spoke out bitterly against "splitting the Union into sections." He held that as the Union had been considerably weakened by the loss of members, it could not afford to dispense with a strong centralized organiza-

tion. There is no doubt that the central body was often out of touch with the branches. It was also true that branches often took the initiative and forced a strike almost before the central body knew of the branch's existence. The labourer, so patient, so long-suffering, once roused was difficult to restrain. To dare to join a Union was itself an heroic act, requiring an amount of courage undreamt of by the town labourer. Having performed an act so revolutionary, the labourer chafed at inaction. Merely to belong to a Union and pay twopence a week was too much like disillusionment.

In 1877 a Sick Benefit Society was introduced. It was this, according to some critics, which became one of the chief causes of the ultimate collapse of the Union. For many years there had existed in the villages semi-charitable clubs, encouraged by the landed gentry and farmers who contributed towards their maintenance. Many of these clubs were, as Arch says, "rotten to the core." Canon Girdlestone had written (*Spectator*, September 1873) of the "innumerable, bankrupt village clubs, patted on the back by owners and occupiers of land and by the publicans, where the poor man's small and hard-earned savings are wasted in bands of music, flags, and feasting." The labourers had been in the habit of contributing to these clubs, and, not unnaturally, they wanted them to come under the control of the Union.

The Union Benefit Society took over many of these district societies. They were taken over irrespective of age or standard of health, provided

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they had funds amounting to £1 per member. As an attempt to increase the membership of the Union it was a failure, for the younger men were not attracted, as the Union could not promise them increased wages, and the older men remained on mainly because of the Sick Benefit Society. Thus the Union became burdened with members who were continually drawing upon the funds.

With the exception of a slight revival in Norfolk and Suffolk during 1883, the Union gradually declined, until, in 1889, it had only 4,254 members. These members were scattered up and down the Midland and Eastern counties, in what were virtually Sick and Funeral Clubs. Most of the smaller Unions had disappeared altogether, though it was said that the Kent and Sussex Union still had over 10,000 members.

After the collapse of the Union in 1874 its members favoured political action as a means of raising their status. It rapidly became a political, rather than a purely Trade Union. During the later seventies and early eighties the activities of the Union were directed more and more into political channels, and the franchise became its foremost demand. When the vote was obtained in 1884 the Union continued to lose ground

“largely,” as Arch says, “owing to the fact that an important part of the work was done (though by no means all) : the men had the vote ; it was as if they had a wide door set open before them, and they thought they could get all they wanted by means of their representative in Parliament.”



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The grounds for these expectations were to be found in the Radical Programme of the period, to which many of the labourers' political friends subscribed.

The general wave of Trade Unionism which swept over the country after the successful dock strike roused the farm labourers to take action. The Eastern counties took the lead. The *Eastern Counties Labour Federation* was formed with its centre in Ipswich (May 1890), and soon had 3,000 members in the surrounding villages. At the end of 1892 the membership stood at 17,000, but many were in arrears with their payments. About the same time the *Norfolk and Norwich Amalgamated Union* arose. The old *National* began to revive, and between 1889 and 1890 increased its membership from 2,454 to 14,000. In 1891 it had 12,000 members in Norfolk alone, and its great strength at this period resided in the three counties of Norfolk, Essex, and Suffolk. The old *Kent and Sussex Labourers' Union* once more sprang into life under the name of the *London and Counties Labour League*, and extended its branches throughout the South-Eastern counties.

The dockers had learnt one great lesson, which was that the existence of a mass of low-paid labourers in the country placed unskilled workers in the towns at the mercy of their employers. One of the reasons given for the dockers' success was that it was harvest-time, a period during which employers could not easily obtain black-leg labour from the country. The dockers' delegates to the Trade

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Union Congress brought up the question of organizing the farm labourers. This they followed up by activity in the rural districts, and during 1890 delegates from the Dockers' Union were busy among the farm labourers in Oxfordshire and Lincolnshire.

*The Land Restoration League* was also very active in many of the country districts about this period. Its objects were (1) to educate the agricultural labourers by means of lectures, leaflets, etc., in the principles of land restoration; (2) to promote their organization for the bettering of their condition, and especially with a view to political action on the land question; and (3) to collect accurate information as to the social condition of the villages under landlordism. Propaganda was carried on by means of speakers who travelled from place to place in Red Vans, bearing upon them the inscription: "Fair wages. The Land for all. Fair Rents." As a result of the League meetings many new Union branches were started and hundreds of farm labourers were induced to join. In its annual report the League states:—

"The difficulties in the way of organizing the labourers are very great in some of the villages, especially where the village belongs entirely to one man, or where the labourers live in cottages owned by the farmers and are liable to lose both home and employment at a week's notice; or where the breaking up of former organizations has left the men dispirited and distrustful."

According to Hasbach, at the beginning of 1894 the following Agricultural Unions were in exist-

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ence: (1) The old *National Agricultural Union* (Leamington); (2) the old but re-named *London and Counties Labour League* (London); (3) *The Warwickshire Agricultural and General Labourers' Union* (Leamington); (4) *The Wiltshire Agricultural and General Labourers' Union* (Devizes); (5) *The Berkshire Agricultural and General Workers' Union* (Reading); (6) *The Hertfordshire Land and Labour League* (Hitchin); (7) *The Eastern Counties Labour Federation* (Ipswich); (8) *The Norfolk and Norwich Amalgamated Labourers' Union* (Norwich); (9) *The Herefordshire Workers' Union* (Kingsland). By 1900, with one or two unimportant exceptions, all these Unions ceased to exist. Those that lingered on remained inactive and impotent.

In 1899 *The Workers' Union*, a Union started in 1898 for the purpose of organizing unskilled labour of all kinds, commenced to work among farm labourers. During that year over forty branches were formed in Staffordshire, North Shropshire, South Cheshire, and Norfolk, with a total membership of nearly 2,000. No attempt was made to organize farm labourers in other counties. The Union claimed that it succeeded in raising wages in some districts by 1s. to 3s. a week. This success, however, was only temporary, for during the general depression in Trade Unionism it lost practically all the members of the farm labourers' section.

## CHAPTER VII

### RESULTS

*"A work remains, the work of surpassing all they have done."*

THOUGH the Unions did not succeed in permanently improving the labourer's economic position, they gave him a taste of power. He was no longer a submissive, inarticulate beast of burden. His back had been straightened; he stood erect and took his own measure. The Unions had given him knowledge; they had given him a voice. As Mr. Jesse Collings says: "The labourer had learnt to look beyond his village; he acquired new ideas, a glimmer of independence, and above all, he became capable of active discontent with his lot, without which it was impossible to help him."

If it cannot be said that the Unions effected a permanent rise in wages in many districts, it can be said that in some districts wages never dropped to their old level. One of the members of the Richmond Commission (1881) said to Arch, "I am paying fully 60 per cent. more for my labour since you began this Union."

## R E S U L T S

“ It was an undeniable fact,” says Arch, “ that in **many** parts of England, where wages had been kept up to twelve and thirteen shillings a week, they would have run down to nine and ten if it had not been for the Union.”

It was undoubtedly true that, having regard to the methods of cultivation, Agriculture was carrying more men than it could efficiently employ. Had the industry been properly organized it could easily have absorbed all the surplus labour. The State simply allowed matters to drift. Its policy of *laissez-faire* amounted to sheer laziness. The Unions came to the rescue, and by organizing, migration, and emigration performed a national service.

Co-operation with his fellows for common ends awakened the labourer's intelligence. The *Chronicle* gave him a taste for reading and widened his outlook. A discerning contributor to the *Congregationalist* wrote, in 1876 :—

“ The change which has taken place in the ordinary conversation of the village is extremely remarkable, and must be regarded as indicating an entire revolution in thought and in manner of life.”

Professor Thorold Rogers, speaking at a meeting in Oxford in 1878, said that a squire who lived near Oxford had told him that “ he was extremely thankful that the Labourers' Union had come into the parish, where he owned every inch of land. It had raised the men to a higher level, and in some districts this Union . . . had been the cause of the diminution of pauperism.”

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In villages where formerly there had been practically no communal life, the Unions had succeeded in drawing the labourers together in social intercourse. Though membership was confined to men, the men were actively supported by their wives and daughters, who marched with them at the demonstrations, officiated at the social gatherings, and equalled the men in enthusiasm. One of the delegates said that he knew a woman who had threatened to tear off all the hair from her husband's head if he did not join the Union!

In districts where the men had migrated to the North, the women attended the Union meetings in place of their husbands. The *Newbury Weekly News*, reporting a Union meeting, said:—

“Almost all the agricultural labourers of Redburn appeared to be assembled with their sons, and some of their wives, on Redburn Common on Thursday. A delegate spoke. For three hours in a bitter cold wind, they stood on the grass, and all, especially the women, listened intently.”

Certainly, the issue at stake affected women quite as much as men. In fact, the women suffered most of all. The mother was the first to feel the pinch of starvation. In the distribution of the scanty fare she was the last to be served, and almost invariably hers was the smallest share. She it was who had to spend most of her life in the insanitary, damp, overcrowded, inconvenient hovel. There she had to cook, mend, wash, iron, tend the sick, bring up a large family, and wear



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herself out in the futile attempt to keep out of debt. Her husband, it is true, had to work hard, and suffer many hardships and indignities ; but hers was the greater burden. A hard, open-air life is infinitely preferable to continual drudgery in an unhealthy dwelling.

The Union brought joy and hope to the women. There were the brighter days—the gala days, when the branch had its socials and demonstrations. There they joined together in singing. The following were great favourites in the early days :—

### STAND LIKE THE BRAVE.

O workmen awake, for the strife is at hand ;  
With right on your side, then, with hope firmly stand ;  
To meet your oppressors, go, fearlessly go,  
And stand like the brave, with your face to the foe.  
    Stand like the brave, stand like the brave ;  
    Oh, stand like the brave, with your face to the foe.

Whatever's the danger, take heed and beware,  
And turn not your back—for no armour is there ;  
Seek righteous reward for your labour—then go  
And stand like the brave, with your face to the foe.

The cause of each other with vigour defend,  
Be honest and true, and fight to the end ;  
Where duty may lead you go, fearlessly go,  
And stand like the brave, with your face to the foe.

Let hope, then, still cheer us ; though long be the strife,  
More comforts shall come to the workman's home life ;  
More food for our children ; demand it, then go  
And stand like the brave, with your face to the foe

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Press on, never doubting redemption draws near—  
Poor serfs shall arise from oppression and fear ;  
Though great ones oppose you, they cannot o'erthrow  
If you stand like the brave, with your face to the foe.

## THE FINE OLD ENGLISH LABOURER.

Come, lads, and listen to my song, a song of honest toil,  
'Tis of the English labourer, the tiller of the soil ;  
I'll tell you how he used to fare, and all the ills he bore,  
Till he stood up in his manhood, resolved to bear no more.  
This fine old English labourer, one of the present time.

He used to take whatever wage the farmer chose to pay,  
And work as hard as any horse for eighteenpence a day ;  
Or if he grumbled at the nine, and dared to ask for ten,  
The angry farmer cursed and swore, and sacked him  
there and then.

He used to tramp off to his work while town folk were abed,  
With nothing in his belly but a slice or two of bread ;  
He dined upon potatoes, and he never dreamed of meat,  
Except a lump of bacon fat sometimes by way of treat.

He used to find it hard enough to give his children food,  
But sent them to the village school as often as he could ;  
But though he knew that school was good, they must  
have bread and clothes,  
So he had to send them to the fields to scare away the  
crows.

He used to walk along the fields and see his landlord's  
game  
Devour his master's growing crops, and think it was a  
shame ;  
But if the keeper found on him a rabbit or a wire,  
He got it hot when brought before the parson and the  
squire.

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But now he's wide awake enough and doing all he can ;  
At last, for honest labour's rights, he's fighting like a man ;  
Since squires and landlords will not help, to help himself  
    he'll try,  
And if he does not get fair wage, he'll know the reason  
    why.

They used to treat him as they liked in the evil days of  
    old,  
They thought there was no power on earth to beat the  
    power of gold ;  
They used to threaten what they'd do whenever work  
    was slack,  
But now he laughs their threats to scorn with the Union  
    at his back.  
    This fine old English labourer, one of the present time.

Occasionally there were field days, when contingents headed by bands arrived from all the neighbouring districts. Such a gathering took place at Yeovil in June 1873. Lord Edmund Fitzmaurice presided over a large and enthusiastic meeting on Lyneham Green, and letters endorsing the movement were received from Samuel Morley, C. H. Spurgeon, G. O. Trevelyan, and others. " Tents were erected, refreshments, ginger-bread stalls were scattered about. Aunt Sally and other sports were provided. Dancing and kiss-in-the-ring were thoroughly enjoyed." Thus, the regeneration of village life began with the Unions. They stirred the labourer, and gave him a new outlook and new ideas, and put spirit into him.

This spirit found expression in political activity. After the lock-out of 1874 little was heard of strikes and lock-outs. The Union concentrated on ques-

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tions, such as the Parliamentary franchise for agricultural labourers, changes in the land laws, the democratization of local government, and the disestablishment of the Church. These were wide claims, and far exceeded the demands of the older Trade Unions of the town artisans. In fact, the *Agricultural Labourers' Union* was the first to enter the political arena. It was not until 1878 that the other Unions definitely entered the political field.

Almost from the first the franchise had been one of the Union's chief demands. The *Chronicle*, a week after the first anniversary of the meeting at Leamington, placed this demand second in its programme. At the Yeovil demonstration in June 1873 most of the men wore cards in their hats, upon which the following was written:—

“The franchise for agricultural labourers. 15s. a week all the year round and no surrender.”

*The Times*, as early as June 1873, said:—

“We cannot think that the question before us is simply one of labour and wages. It is rather the real and complete elevation of the agricultural labourer to a higher and larger share of our common, and perhaps we may add, our Christian humanity. He is to be made more independent, more self-governing, more rational, more a social personage—in a word, more of a man. He is to be made really a citizen of the great commonwealth, and more worthy of the franchise which one day he is to have.”

Mr. George Dixon, M.P., in July 1873 presented to the House of Commons a petition in favour of household franchise, signed by 82,000 farm labourers.

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All through the seventies the agitation for the franchise was kept going. Arch says: "I was bitterly disappointed when the Bill (George Trevelyan's) was defeated in 1875. . . . But of course we only kept agitating more and more, and the franchise was a front plank in the Union platform from this time onwards." At the branch meetings franchise songs frequently took the place of the old Union favourites. The labourers sent petition after petition to the House of Commons in favour of household suffrage in the counties. Getting signatures for these petitions kept the men busy, and also helped to keep them united. Arch himself presented a petition seventeen yards long, signed by 80,000 farm labourers. The agitation did not cease until the franchise was conceded in 1884.

It is not difficult to understand why the Unions agitated for the disestablishment of the Church of England. The Church with its huge landed estates was a part of the oppressive land system; it had representatives in every parish, who for the most part were utterly hostile to the demands of the labourers. It appeared to the latter that most of the clergy were as anxious to preserve their tithes as the landlord his rents. Most of them, too, received their livings from members of the landlord class. The squire, the farmer, and the clergyman were to the labourer a sinister trinity of privilege, oppression, and patronage, to which he owed traditional homage. Rumour had it that the parson's glebe, no less than the squire's demesne, had been enlarged by the enclosure of the people's

commons. The suspicion of generations expressed itself at Union meetings, and the actual hostility of so many clergymen confirmed this suspicion in the minds of the labourers. A number of the leaders of the Unions were Dissenters, and this to some extent explains the vehemence with which the Church was attacked.

The *Chronicle* from the beginning had, week by week, bitterly assailed the Church. It was this agitation which caused Canon Girdlestone to sever his official connection with the Union. In an article which he wrote to the *Spectator* (September 6, 1873), he wrote of the "dangerous turn the agitation was taking," and denounced "their meddling with the resources of our clergy and any political tinkering of theirs with the connection of Church and State." He complained that the Union had degenerated into a "mere political engine for bringing about a social revolution."

The maladministration of charitable trusts, which, as Hasbach points out, "often consisted of land, and were not seldom withdrawn by the trustees from their original objects," caused the labourers to agitate for a searching inquiry to be made.

"In many and many a village," says Arch, "the charity land had been diverted from the purpose intended and enclosed in the farms, and when a poor man wanted a piece of land he had perhaps to pay the parson at the rate of £3 or £4 an acre for it."

The Game Laws, under which labourers had to submit to the indignities of compulsory search on



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the highway, also came in for a great deal of bitter criticism, and Arch spoke strongly upon the subject when he appeared before the Select Committee in 1873.

The housing question also was brought prominently to the front. Bitter were the complaints against the "tied" cottage system. This system was used as a weapon by the farmers for the purpose of smashing the Union. In one district, at least, where the farmers had given their men notice to quit their cottages, they resolved to let them in future on a weekly tenancy in order that any Union man might easily be evicted. The Duke of Marlborough in 1872 placed the cottages and allotments on his estates in the hands of the farmers in order, as he said, to keep the labourers in check. In his evidence before the Richmond Commission, Arch said :—

"I think if the farmer is going in for tenant right, which of course I hold with, there should be legislation to grant the labourers' cottage right. . . . If a labourer has a proper notice to quit, well and good ; but I call it a monstrous injustice that he should be driven out of his cottage on a week's notice."

These agitations irritated the landed class beyond endurance, and to some extent account for the unrelenting opposition to the labourers' right to combine. Such agitations revealed a danger which threatened the interests of the landed classes far more than a mere rise in wages ; for the claims which inspired them were revolutionary. They

stood for the dethronement of territorial power, because, without vassals, such power vanishes.

Some opposed the labourers because the movement might lead to the dissolution of what they regarded as benevolent despotism ; others, because in their near-sighted, selfish way they could see their privileges slipping away. Both attitudes are represented to-day. Neither is right, because both presuppose the necessity for a servile class, and derive their sanction from traditional abuses.

The leaders of the Unions, much to their credit, placed great emphasis on the need for education. The Elementary Education Act of 1870 was in force, and the Unions did much to see that its provisions were carried out in the villages. At their meetings they advocated the regular attendance of the children at school, and tried to raise the moral standard in the home. Even the labourers themselves, many of them, did not regard the education of their children as a priceless boon. Rather they looked to the children to augment the family income. Who can blame them when wages were so low, and living so hard ?

The leaders of the Union had known to their cost what ignorance meant. Arch, describing the difficulties which confronted the Union, wrote :—

“ They (the labourers) were obstinate, suspicious, and stupid, because they were so ignorant ; their brains were ill-nourished and so they were dull ; their uncultivated minds were like dark lanterns with a rushlight inside ; they did not know how to think anything out, and they did not even know how to try.”

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The Unions therefore made education one of their foremost claims, and besides keeping a vigilant eye upon the working of the Act of 1870, assisted the labourers' friends in the passing of the Education Bill of 1876.

The regular attendance of the children at school meant to some families a loss of three or four shillings a week, and this was a serious drawback. To make up for the loss to the family income, the Unions urged that the labourers should be given plots of land to till.

There is no doubt that the Allotments Acts of 1882 and 1887, and the Small Holdings Acts of 1892 and 1894 were largely responses to the Union's demand for access to land for the labourers. The passing of the Parish Councils Act, and the Local Government Act of 1894, the principles of which had long been advocated by the Unions, synchronized with the revival of Unionism among the labourers. These enactments did not, nor can they of themselves, emancipate the labourer. But they have placed in his hands a powerful instrument which, if rightly used, may, in the near future, make rural democracy a possibility.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TWO LEADERS

*" They live in brothers again ready to defy you."*

No history of Agricultural Labourers' Unions, however brief, would be complete without some reference to the personalities connected with the movement. Mention has been made of the many men not of the working class who associated themselves with the labourers' cause. But the revolt of the labourers produced some remarkable men from among the rank and file. It is not possible to single out all the brave men who devoted themselves loyally to the improvement of their class. Their names are legion. In their respective localities some of them are remembered and honoured to this day. For instance, in Somerset and Wiltshire the name of George Mitchell (" One from the Plough ") is held in reverence by the older labourers who remember his boundless enthusiasm. He was a stonemason who threw himself into the labourers' movement. George Rix is a name that always will be associated with the labourers' cause in Norfolk. Again, there is

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Henry Taylor, the indefatigable general secretary of the *National*. He, too, was not an agricultural labourer, but a carpenter. But the name that always will be associated with the most formidable revolt of the labourer in the nineteenth century will be that of Joseph Arch.

More than forty years have passed by since the name of Joseph Arch first became a household word in this country. To the present generation his name is scarcely known. In many a rural poor-house and pensioner's cottage the memory of "Joey Arch" is still enshrined in the hearts of those unhonoured but honourable men and women who in their younger days were quickened by hopes of a sunlit future. To them the name of Arch stands for that emancipation of which they caught glimpses, but which they never permanently attained.

His active public life began in 1872, when he was forty-six years of age, and closed when he was in his 75th year, since when, until his death in 1919, he lived in retirement. Born in 1826 at Barford, a village in Warwickshire, as a youth he gained notoriety as one who could plough and sow as well as any man in the village, and while still in his teens became the "champion hedgecutter of England." Master of his craft, he was not content to stay at home. He travelled into many of the neighbouring counties, and also in Wales, plying his craft as hedgecutter and undertaking mowing contracts. In this way he was able not only to earn more money, but also to broaden his mind.

Contact with different classes of farmers and labourers did much to free him from the narrow prejudices which so often characterized the stay-at-home. He saw much discontent among the different classes of labourers with whom he mixed, and he realized how amply it was justified. After many wanderings, Arch returned to his native village. Thus while still a young man, he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with the common lot of the agricultural labourer. One of the things which had impressed him while away from home was the tremendous advantage possessed by a labourer who was secure in his dwelling. The great bulwark of the Arch family was their freehold cottage.

His father was an ordinary labourer who never earned more than ten shillings a week. The family was always in a state of chronic poverty, but even this could not tame the proud spirit of the mother. She hated servitude more than poverty, and it was this pride of spirit that she instilled into the lad who was destined to become the future leader of the oppressed labourers. "Ah, my boy, you shall never, never do that. I will work these fingers to the bone before you have to do it!" she exclaimed to her son, as the neighbours' children went to the rectory for soup. She kept her word. A woman like Mrs. Arch was bound to rebel against the little hierarchy which dominated the village. The brand of social inferiority distinguished the labourers and their families from the tradesmen, farmers, squires, and parsons, even in the House of



God. In Barford Church the poor were allotted their own places, and were not permitted to mingle with their "superiors." The squire and other magnates sat curtained off from the vulgar gaze, while the rector's wife sat in a pew in the chancel, and the poor women and girls walked up the church and curtsied to her before taking their seats. Mrs. Arch defied the rector's wife in this as in other matters.

Arch was obliged to leave school before he reached the age of nine, having received less than three years' regular tuition. But with the help of his mother he was enabled to pick up what was considered at the time to be a fair education. Quite early in life he became associated with the Dissenters, who used to hold meetings in a barn. When quite a young man he joined the Methodists and commenced to preach. He attained considerable notoriety in his own district, not only as a deeply religious man, and an earnest and eloquent preacher, but as a good and reliable labourer who could turn his hand to anything. However, in spite of hard work, thrift, and sobriety, he was unable to save money, and he found it extremely difficult to maintain his wife and seven children in decency and comfort. Thus, until he was 46 years of age, he continued to live the life of an ordinary labourer. The time came when he put aside spade and hook, and undertook the task for which his life had been one long preparation.

From 1872 to 1885 he was closely associated with

the movement which he did so much to foster. Mr. Jesse Collings says :—

“ He entered into the struggle with the single aim of bettering the conditions of his fellow-labourers whose sufferings he knew so well. He had passed through the bitter experience himself, and had discharged special family obligations with a courage and independence worthy of respect and admiration.”

His antipathy towards the clergy of the Establishment was perhaps too unrelenting, but taking into account the treatment which he and his kind had received at their hands, it was not altogether inexplicable. His power over the labourers in the early days of the movement was due to his earnestness and personal integrity. The *Newbury Weekly News* describing one of his meetings said :—

“ Whether for good or for evil, he has probably a greater influence over an outdoor assembly of labourers than any other man in England. . . . As long as the movement has such a man for its champion, there is little doubt of its vitality or even aggressiveness.”

Clayden, who accompanied him on his Canadian tour, says that Arch was pressed to speak at Boston, and spoke for an hour before a large assembly. “ Wendell Phillips and General Butler, who had come to patronise, were lost in admiration of the perfect self-command and ease of expression displayed by the English farm-labourer.”

His free use of Scriptural texts and analogies, which was the result of his training as a local preacher, laid him open to the charge of being a

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“canting ranter.” But such was not the case. When, at Newbury, speaking in the open air, he said, “The Mayor has denied us the Corn Exchange, but our Heavenly Father has sent us a beautiful nice, fine evening, and let us have this spacious building,” he sincerely believed such to be a fact.

In reviewing his life-work, he writes :—

“I know that it was the hand of the Lord of Hosts which led me that day: that the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth raised me up to do this particular thing; that in the counsel of His wisdom He singled me out, and set me on my feet in His sight, and breathed of the breath of His Spirit into me, and sent me forth as a messenger of the Lord God of Battles. So I girded up my loins and went forth.”

Perhaps it was this implicit faith in Divine guidance which made it a little difficult for some of his colleagues to work with him. He was an orator, not an organizer, and was inclined to be rather intolerant of ideas not fathered by himself. He was not always able to believe in the disinterestedness of those of his colleagues who did not always see eye to eye with him in Union policy.

It is not an easy matter to estimate the influence Arch had upon the life and outlook of the agricultural labourer. He undertook a difficult task, and in spite of much opposition and misrepresentation, succeeded in inducing the labourers to combine for the purpose of improving their lot. Critics have arisen to condemn not only his aims, but also his methods. But taking into consideration the times in which he worked, and the material he had

to work upon, it cannot be said that his mission was a failure. He did succeed in rousing the labourers from their habitual indifference and servitude.

In 1877 Arch was invited by two different Liberal Associations, Southwark and Woodstock, to stand as Liberal candidate. He refused both offers, as he felt that the time was not ripe, and that he could do better work outside Parliament. However, when in 1880 he was invited by the Wilton Liberal Society to oppose the "independent" member, he consented to stand and fight against "Tory landlordism, war, bad trade, starvation, and the 'cat.'" Feeling ran high at this period over the use of the cat-o'-nine-tails in the Army, and in his election campaign Arch strongly condemned its use. However, he failed to get returned.

Having obtained the vote, the labourers felt they ought to have a representative in Parliament. Arch was invited by the working men of North-West Norfolk to stand as their candidate in the General Election which took place in November 1885. He stood in the "Liberal and labouring-class interest." In his election address Arch said he would

"support the extension of Free Trade to all articles of food; a measure for conferring local government by boards upon county districts; the complete reform of the land laws; compensation for improvements in the soil; total abolition of the law of distress; power to government or local boards to acquire land at reasonable purchase value, and to re-let the same in allotments;

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disestablishment of the Church ; free, secular elementary education ; Sunday closing of public-houses, except to bona fide travellers ; abolition of perpetual pensions ; substitution of arbitration for war ; and equal laws for all parts of the United Kingdom."

This programme contained no direct reference to the labourers or to Trade Unionism. It clearly indicates the changed attitude of the labourers. They were looking forward to "a complete reform of the land laws as the means whereby they could obtain better conditions." This agitation of the labourers for land reform undoubtedly gave Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, M.P., his cue for the *Unauthorized Programme*.

After a very rough and rowdy campaign, Arch was returned by a majority of 640. His election expenses were paid for him by wealthy men—presumably Liberals—and while in Parliament his expenses were paid by the Union. In the House, Arch wore similar clothes to those he wore when addressing meetings of labourers—a rough tweed suit and a billycock hat. In the following year another election took place at the time of the Home Rule split. This time Arch was beaten by 20 votes.

After 1885 Arch never seemed to get back into his Union "stride." As a Member of Parliament he had to be in London when the House was sitting, and this prevented him from keeping in close touch with the Union movement. When no longer a Member of the House, he toured the constituencies to support the Liberal Party, addressing meetings

on the land question. He had become a "star turn" at such meetings, and was in great demand at the period Chamberlain was attracting attention by the *Unauthorized Programme*. After the enactment of the Local Government Act (1888) Arch became a member of the Worcestershire County Council.

At the General Election of 1892 he again contested North-West Norfolk in opposition to the late member, Lord Henry Bentinck. This time Arch secured a majority of over a thousand. The labourers were dissatisfied with the Tory Allotments Act of 1887, and declared that the Small Holdings Acts were of little, if any, use to them. They wanted not only greater opportunities of getting land, but also a larger voice in the control of local affairs. Arch, outlining his policy at this period, said :—

"After the Irish question is got out of the way we must have Parish Councils. By conferring upon these councils the control of the charities and the administration of the Poor Law many of the abuses at present existing will be disposed of. These Councils, too, must take over the matters of rating and education in the villages. Then, above all, they must have the power to compulsorily acquire as much land for the labourer as he wants, at the same rent as land is letting in the district. The labourers must, moreover, have conceded to them the right to sell their improvements if they choose."

Arch sat as Member for North-West Norfolk until 1900, when he retired from public life. Several of his political friends subscribed towards pro-



viding a small annuity, sufficient to place him beyond the reach of want for the remainder of his days. He sought retirement in the little cottage which had been his home all through his varied career.

Before and after he became a Member of Parliament he gave evidence before several Royal Commissions and Select Committees. In the House he, on many occasions, championed the cause of the labourer. His greatest work, however, was accomplished before he entered the House of Commons. It must be admitted that his membership of the House did not have a beneficial effect upon his personal character. In the very nature of the case, a man of Arch's class and training would require a tremendous reserve of moral strength to enable him to counteract the subtle tendencies towards moral deterioration, which almost inevitably accompany honour and success. In the House he was a novelty, a picturesque figure with a romantic history. Flattery, showered upon him by people who wished to use him for their own purposes, tended to spoil him. His very ingenuousness prevented him from avoiding the snare; it laid him specially open to this form of weakness.

His humbler colleagues, who slaved away unnoticed at the difficult task which Arch had all but relinquished owing to his "Parliamentary Duties," began to weary a little of his vanity, which led to further disunion. However, the words which were penned by Professor Thorold



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Rogers may be quoted as the present writer's opinion of Joseph Arch :—

“ I believe he has done no little service to his own order, but I conclude he has done more for the general interests of labour, if only by showing how universal is the instinct that workmen can better their condition only by joint and united action.”

Since the days when Joseph Arch was an active force among farm labourers, no one has had a better claim than George Edwards to speak and act on their behalf. The mantle of Arch fell upon the shoulders of one who had been his co-worker during the strenuous battles of the seventies and eighties. George Edwards was among those who helped to gain the franchise for the farm labourer. In the fight for Parish and District Councils, Education, Allotments and Small Holdings, none were more strenuous than he. For nearly fifty years he has agitated for greater freedom, shorter hours, and higher wages for the worst paid skilled worker in the land. One of his deep-rooted convictions is that, if the farm labourer's position is permanently to be improved, they must co-operate, and take united action. In short, they must copy the farmers—and join a Union.

George Edwards belongs to what is termed the “ old school ” of Trade Unionists, and in some respects he has carried on the Arch tradition. Like Arch he is a keen fighter, and yet tempers his pugnacity with a reasonable degree of moderation. His quality as a fighter is only matched by his

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ability as a conciliator. Like Joseph Arch, George Edwards was a farm labourer, and the son of a farm labourer. The whole of his life has been spent among them. The story of his early life is a story of continual struggle against poverty. Bad as are the conditions of the farm labourers to-day, they were very much worse when George Edwards was a boy.

He was born in 1850 at Marsham, ten miles from Norwich. His father was an ex-soldier who had returned to the soil. There were seven children to keep on a wage of eight shillings a week. The mother had to work at handloom weaving in order to supplement the family income. Had she not done this, the family would have starved.

George Edwards never went to school in his life. At the age of six he was sent to work, and followed the plough until he was ten years of age. At a meeting of the Norfolk County Council in 1915, when protesting against farmers taking advantage of the national crisis to rob farm labourers' children of the maximum amount of education they were entitled to under the Education Acts, he recalled his early experiences, and said "he owed his smallness of stature to being dragged into the fields when a boy of six years old; to overwork and bad living; and he was anxious that the rising generation should not be dragged into the field, and back into the old system."

At the age of seventeen he became a member of the Primitive Methodist Church, and was made a local preacher when he was twenty-two, although

at that time he could neither read nor write. His wife, who had managed to pick up a little education, taught him to read, and helped him to memorize the first chapter of St. John and three hymns for the first service he ever conducted !

When the Parish and District Councils were set up, George Edwards was elected to represent his parish on the District Council. His wife was elected for the neighbouring parish, and for ten years they worked side by side on the same Council.

When in 1872 *The National Agricultural Labourers' Union* extended its organization to Norfolk, he became an active member, and helped to spread the movement locally. When disunion arose, many of the Norfolk farm labourers seceded from the *National* and formed a new Union called the *Norfolk and Norwich Amalgamated Labourers' Union*. George Edwards was appointed General Secretary. This Union survived all others, but became defunct in 1896.

In 1906, after the General Election, there was a great deal of victimization. The farm labourers from all parts appealed to George Edwards to make another attempt to organize them into a Union. This Union was the forerunner of the present *Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union*.

In April 1912 his wife, who had been his help-mate and companion for many years, passed away. The Lancashire strike, coming shortly after this sad event, imposed a great strain upon him, and affected his health. At the conclusion of the strike, when victory had been secured, he resigned his

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position as General Secretary. On his retirement he was elected Vice-President of the Union.

In 1914 he was made a Justice of the Peace for his native county. He unsuccessfully contested North-West Norfolk in the 1918 "Coupon" Election.

Although no longer General Secretary of the Union, he has by no means refrained from taking an active part in its counsels. He represents the labourers on the Central Wages Board, and it is to be hoped that the farm labourers will be able to benefit by his assistance for many years to come.





TWENTIETH CENTURY



## CHAPTER I

### THE BETRAYAL

*"Your schemes, politics, fail, lines give way, substances mock and elude me."*

FROM the first the farm worker had realized that complete emancipation would not be attained merely by periodic adjustments of wages and hours. He instinctively knew that the land question was at the root of most of his troubles. He regarded access to the land as a sure means of escape from his low condition. What the Unions had failed to gain the vote would soon accomplish. What Parliament had taken away Parliament could restore. The common lands had been enclosed at a time when the farm worker had no say in the matter; by means of the vote the dispossessed farm worker hoped to regain his birthright. Since 1884 the farm worker has been courted and cajoled by each of the great political parties. Liberal and Tory programmes have been full of promises, from the time of Mr. Chamberlain's *Unauthorized Programme* down to Mr. Lloyd George's *Land Campaign*. There have been Allotment Acts, Small Holdings Acts and Housing Acts, but these have

not really succeeded in effecting much improvement in the lives of the great mass of farm workers.

On the whole allotments have been supplied in a very grudging, niggardly fashion. In most villages in 1914 the number of allotments was insufficient to meet the demand; in some villages there were none available. The *Land Enquiry Committee* in 1913 estimated that about a third of the villages in England and Wales were without any allotments. This Committee came to the conclusion that "there is a great unsatisfied demand for allotments on the part of the labourer, amounting in some parts of the country to a veritable land hunger."

Often, owing to its distance from the village and the poor quality of the soil, an allotment has been a burden rather than a boon to the farm worker. Far from improving his social outlook, it has often meant only additional toil to a man whose hours of labour were already too long, but whose scanty wages compelled him to overwork himself in order to eke out a bare subsistence.

The supply of small holdings also is far behind the demand. Some counties have succeeded in satisfying the demands of a large number of applicants, but in others practically none have been provided, especially in those counties where wages were low and where the farm worker was unable to exert pressure by means of his Union. But, even in the best counties, it has not been the farm worker who has succeeded in getting a small holding; it has more often been tradesmen, such as the

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village blacksmith, carpenter, or publican, who have been selected. The test as to whether an applicant is suitable has too often been, not Is he the most capable person, but Has he sufficient capital? There are thousands of farm workers who possess the necessary skill, but those with sufficient capital are very few indeed. This fact was acknowledged by the Rt. Hon. W. Runciman when he was President of the Board of Agriculture. "There were," he said, "very few labourers among the applicants, because the low wages paid to agricultural labourers did not enable them to lay by even the small amount of capital required for a small holding." Yet this legislation was passed, it was said, mainly to help farm workers to a position of greater independence! Moreover, small holdings, unless linked together by some form of co-operation, are, generally speaking, uneconomical. Usually they are higher rented, and consequently higher rated, than neighbouring land tenanted by large farmers, and unless the holding is exceedingly well situated as regards markets and transport facilities, these handicaps are too great to allow the experiment to become a success.

The Housing Acts have failed lamentably to grapple with the rural housing problem. Sir Henry Rew, in his report to the Board of Agriculture on the *Decline in the Agriculture Population 1881-1906*, says:—

"Among specific causes of discontent a deficiency of adequate or satisfactory housing accommodation is reported from about thirty counties."

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Under the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909, valuable work has been done in the way of *inspection* and *enquiry*, but practically no cottages have been built, although a certain number "unfit for human habitation" have been repaired.

The evidence as to the shortage of decent cottages for farm workers is overwhelming. Even before the war the lack of good cottages was a scandal which called aloud for redress. The conclusions regarding housing arrived at by the *Land Enquiry Committee* set up by the Rt. Hon. Lloyd George in 1912 have been challenged, but never really confuted, and subsequent committees have endorsed the findings of that famous Committee, which were as follows:—

1. That there is an urgent need in every county for more labourers' cottages, especially for cottages with three bedrooms.

2. That the condition of many of the existing cottages is most unsatisfactory, a considerable number being entirely unfit for human habitation.

3. That there is a great deal of overcrowding, which frequently makes it impossible to provide for the proper separation of the sexes.

4. That the unsatisfactory housing conditions are largely responsible for:

- (a) A good deal of the rural depopulation, resulting in a serious interference with the supply of labour.

- (b) A serious loss of time among labourers who work in one village and have to live in another, or in a neighbouring town.

- (c) A general lowering of the standard of life among those who remain in the villages.



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- (d) A serious interference with the independence of the labourers.
- (e) Young couples desiring to marry being obliged to leave the district or to live with their parents or lodge with other families.
- (f) The spread of diphtheria, scarlet fever, and other diseases, and the prevalence of tuberculosis and rheumatism.
- (g) A considerable amount of immorality due to overcrowding.

5. That large numbers of cottages unfit for human habitation are not closed, owing to the lack of alternative accommodation. For the same reason necessary repairs cannot be demanded by the local authority or the tenant, lest the landlord should close the cottage rather than incur the expense of repairing it.

6. That taking into account both the existing scarcity, and also the scarcity that would be created if the Housing Acts were properly enforced, as far as can be estimated, at least 120,000 new cottages are required at the present time in England and Wales.

The Tied Cottage is one of the rankling abuses of village life. It undermines the worker's liberty and saps his independence. A farm worker may be perfectly law-abiding and yet be turned adrift into the road, merely because he exercise—what after all should be the elementary right of every citizen—the right to vote for whom he pleases or to combine with his fellows for legitimate social and economic purposes. In the matter of tied cottages, Parliament has done nothing. The whole question is aggravated by the shortage of decent alternative accommodation. As things are, even though a labourer get another job in the same village, he cannot take it because there are no

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other cottages available. The sting of the tied cottage system would be removed if loss of job did not mean loss of home, if there were alternative homes in the same village. So long as there is a dearth of cottages in rural parishes, the power of the farmer and landowner to tyrannize will remain, and so long, rightly or wrongly, will the farm worker *feel* his dependence.

Since the farm worker gained the vote, political intimidation has been rife in the villages. In 1906 one political party started a league with the object of protecting the worker and exposing political intimidation. Until quite recently the walls of the villages and country towns at election times were covered with placards announcing that the Ballot was secret ! One of the most difficult things to eradicate from the farm worker's mind was that the squire, farmer, and parson would know which way he voted. The same with allotments and small holdings. Many dared not apply for land for fear of incurring the displeasure of the farmers or landowners. To apply for land in some villages was to become a marked man. Even where the fear was unfounded, the knowledge of what had happened in other villages tended to paralyse the farm worker and prevent him exercising his legal rights.

The farm worker had good reason to remain discontented with his lot. No matter which phase of his life was considered, the same lack of prospect confronted him. In his report to the Board of Agriculture on the *Decline in the Agricultural*

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*Population of Great Britain, 1881-1906*, Sir Henry Rew wrote :—

“ Many correspondents refer to the absence of an incentive to remain on the land, and of any reasonable prospect of advancement in life. . . . It is indeed impossible not to recognize that the ordinary career of the agricultural labourer offers little scope for ambition.”

*The Departmental Committee on the Employment of Sailors and Soldiers on the Land*, reporting in 1916, said :—

“ One great drawback to the life of an agricultural labourer is that, no matter how persevering and industrious he may be, he has little prospect of obtaining a position of independence.”

The amount of earnings received by the farm worker was always a matter for dispute. Unlike the majority of town workers, he did not receive all his earnings in the form of money. The “ cash wage ” was usually supplemented by additional pay for overtime, piece work and payments such as harvest money. Then there were “ allowances ” such as a free or an under-rented cottage, a strip of potato land, firing, milk, beer and cider. Even though the cash wage was the same, “ allowances ” and extras varied from village to village and county to county, but in a given parish these did not vary much from year to year. For purposes of comparison the cash wage is the best standard to adopt. It should be noted, however, that the tendency was for farmers to reduce allowances and extra pay-

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ments, especially where higher wages had been obtained.

The Committee which reported on *Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture* (Cd. 24, 1919) estimated that in 1914 the average cash wage for ordinary farm workers was 16s. 9d., an increase of 2s. a week over the 1907 average. These figures, however, only represent nominal wages. What concerns the labourer most is not the amount of his cash wages, but how much they will buy. This is always the test to apply. *Nominal* wages are the amount of money received; *real* wages represent the purchasing power of that money.

In the Report of the Committee appointed by the Wages Board in 1918 (Cd. 76, 1919) there is a section dealing with cost of living in which a table<sup>1</sup> is given comparing estimated cost of *Average Dietary of Agricultural Labourers' Families* (six persons) in England, 1902 and 1912. In 1902 the cost was 13s. 5½d.; in 1912, 15s. 10½d.—an increase in cost of food alone of 2s. 5½d. a week. Therefore the increased cost of food would more than absorb the 2s. rise in wages which occurred between 1907 and 1914.

Assuming that house-rent, clothing, and all the other things that go to make up the cost of living remained stationary, and making allowance for the fact that many labourers do not purchase all the food consumed by their families, it would be difficult to prove that the *real* wages of farm workers were greater in 1914 than 1907.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix III.

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Mr. R. E. Prothero in 1912 wrote: "Speaking generally, labourers in 1912 are better paid, more regularly employed, better housed, better fed, better clothed" than in 1884, the year the vote was obtained. He admitted, however, that "most men of the class are still poorly paid; many are precariously employed and poorly housed;] among all, *poverty is chronic*, and, although destitution is certainly rare, the dread of it is seldom absent." The italics are ours.

A word of caution is necessary when speaking of county averages, for when one comes to deal in detail with particular parishes the wages are often found to be below the average given for the county. Ample published evidence of this is in existence, and may be found in detailed investigations into individual family incomes such as are contained in Miss Maud E. Davies' *Life in an English Village* (Unwin, 1909), *How the Labourer Lives*, Rowntree and Kendall (T. Nelson and Sons, 1913), and in articles contributed by the present writer to the *Westminster Gazette* (April 28 and August 2, 1915).

In the Annual Report (1912) of the *Somersetshire Society*, an organization which collects funds for apprenticing the children of poor parents in that county, the following cases are cited:—

- 654. Father a farm labourer, earning 12s. per week.  
Four children, two dependent on the parents.
- 675. Father a farm labourer, earning 14s. per week;  
eight children, all dependent.
- 699. Father an agricultural labourer earning 12s. a week  
and the mother does occasional charring, earning  
4s. per week. Seven children, all dependent.

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707. Father a farm labourer earning 12s. per week.  
Three children, one dependent.

7. Father an agricultural labourer earning 12s. per week and the mother does occasional charing, earning 4s. per week. Seven children, all dependent.

The last official Board of Trade figures (1907) gave 14s. as the average cash wages of farm workers in the county of Somersetshire.

Between 1871 and 1911 the total number of farm workers in England and Wales *decreased* considerably, as will be seen from the following figures (Cd. 8506, 1917) :—

ENGLAND AND WALES.					
Year.					Male Farm Employees. <sup>1</sup>
1871	..	..	..	..	935,143
1911	..	..	..	..	665,258

The causes of the dearth of skilled farm workers were fairly obvious. Low wages, bad houses, lack of independence, absence of outlook, and the dull, wearying monotony of village life had caused a steady stream of workers to flow into the towns and cities and to the colonies. In spite of thirty years of citizenship the farm worker's position had not improved sufficiently to induce him to stay in the village. It is not surprising that Sir Henry Rew wrote in 1913 :—

“ At the present time considerably more men could find employment on the land than are now available. There certainly appears to be a fairly general deficiency of skilled farm hands.”

<sup>1</sup> Including bailiffs and foremen.



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The shortage of skilled labour was a subject of continual lament at farmers' meetings before the war. The reason, in plain language, was simply this: *farmers generally were not prepared to pay adequate wages for such labour.* The lament was loudest in 1912-13, a time when, according to *The Times* (December 30, 1912), "To a man who takes the trouble to learn and attend to his business farming now offers every prospect of a good return upon his capital."

The curious phenomenon in agricultural economics is that wages do not, as a rule, respond to the ordinary laws of supply and demand—at least when there is a shortage of labour. We have seen how in the thirties and seventies this law operated very thoroughly; there was too many farm workers seeking work, consequently wages were driven to a point well below subsistence level. *In 1912, when the demand for labour was very strong, there were farm workers in most counties who were receiving less than a living wage.* This phenomenon is explained by what is known as the "customary wage," which operates mainly to keep wages *down*. A farmer who had been accustomed to pay a certain wage would sometimes starve his land of labour rather than break with custom and pay higher wages. Again, some farmers were afraid to create bad feeling among their neighbours. A striking instance of this appeared in the *Eastern Daily Press* in 1912. One of the largest farmers in Norfolk decided to pay his married farm workers the magnificent wage of 17s. a week, and his single men

15s. to 15s. 6d. a week, exclusive of extras for harvests. This was announced in the paper on January 8th. The next week (13th) a man signing himself "Tenant Farmer" protested against this violation of custom, and added that the generous farmer "might have made it up to his labourers in some other way, so that it would not make the labourers so dissatisfied on adjoining estates and farms."

Thus, even the progressive farmer was hindered by his less imaginative neighbour. The axiom that well-paid labour is the most economical, and that a free, independent worker, properly housed, is worth more to his employer than an ill-nourished, badly housed, servile worker, will, when it is fully appreciated by farmers generally, go a long way towards raising the dignity of the Agricultural industry.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NEW UNIONS

*"On and on the compact ranks."*

MR. GEORGE EDWARDS and a few political friends of the farm workers decided in 1906 to make a fresh attempt to organize them into a Union. In July a conference was held at North Walsham, in Norfolk, with this object in view. Among those present were Mr. Richard Winfrey M.P., Mr. George Nicholls, M.P., Mr. H. A. Day, and representatives of the agricultural labourers from the Eastern Counties.

A Union known as the *Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers' and Small Holders' Union* was formed. Mr. George Nicholls, M.P., was appointed president, Mr. W. V. Harris, vice-president, Mr. Richard Winfrey, M.P., treasurer, and Mr. George Edwards, general secretary.

The movement was confined to the Eastern Counties. In less than three months about 50 branches were formed with a total membership of 1,600. In February 1907 a conference of delegates from the newly formed branches was convened,

and the Union definitely launched. By 1910 4,000 members had been enrolled. In May 1910 a strike took place among the farm workers in the parish of St. Faith's, Norfolk. Contrary to the rules of the Union, the local branch on its own initiative decided to strike without waiting for the sanction of the Executive. The Executive, however, eventually decided to recognize the strike, and commenced paying strike benefit. The masters refused to come to terms, and the strike continued until December. Up to that time it had cost the Union no less than £1,300. It was felt by the majority of the Executive that the strike should end. The strike collapsed in December, the workers having failed to obtain any concessions whatever. Some were reinstated, but, as the farmers had imported a good deal of labour, many of the men remained on the funds. This failure caused considerable defections from the Union.

At the conference in 1911 a vote of censure, carried by a large majority, was passed on the Executive for closing the strike. This vote led to the resignation of the president and the treasurer. Councillor Walter Smith was elected president in the place of Mr. George Nicholls, M.P., and Mr. H. A. Day, treasurer, in place of Mr. Richard Winfrey, M.P.

In response to appeals from other counties, organizers were sent out at the end of 1911 with the object of forming branches. From this time the Union made steady progress, and by the end of 1912 the membership once again reached 4,000.

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A fresh conference was held in 1912 when the rules and objects were revised and the name altered to the *National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union*. The objects were declared to be :—

“ To regulate the relations between employers and employed. The means by which such objects are to be obtained are as follows :—

(a) To improve the social and moral conditions of its members.

(b) To establish central funds for the purpose of securing a better distribution of the land, by assisting to provide allotments, small holdings, improved housing accommodation, and better conditions of living.

(c) To secure proper legal advice when necessary and to shield members from injustice.

(d) To relieve members out of work through disputes, strikes, or lock-outs, when sanctioned by the Executive Committee or the General Council of the Union.

(e) To encourage intercommunication with Unions in other parts of this country and other countries.”

Membership was not confined to farm workers, but as the name of the Union implies, to “ Rural Workers ” also.

“ Those persons shall be eligible who are Allotment and Small Holders, Agricultural Labourers, Gardeners, Navvies, Yardmen, Carters, Roadmen, Female Workers, Carpenters, and Skilled Artisans, who from health, age, distance of nearest branch or other sufficient reasons are unable to join the recognized Unions of their respective trades, and any other person agreed to by a Branch and not vetoed by the General Council or the Executive Committee.”

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Women were for the first time admitted to membership. The Union became affiliated to the Trade Union Congress, and entitled to send two representatives each year to the annual congress.

In the autumn of 1912 a great deal of unrest existed among farm workers in South-West Lancashire. The increased cost of living and the infectious example of nearly every other section of workers throughout Lancashire, induced the farm worker to seek assistance from his Union.

Organizers were therefore sent to the affected area. The Union made splendid headway, and, during the latter part of 1912 and the early part of 1913 it succeeded in forming nearly 30 branches in the district with a membership of over 2,500 men. The demands put forward were:—

1. Saturday half-holiday, work to cease at 1.0 p.m.
2. Minimum wage of 24s. a week.
3. 6d. an hour overtime; and
4. Recognition of the Union.

One farmer, apparently without consulting his neighbours, immediately dismissed all his hands, eight in number, and gave them notice to quit their cottages. Several farmers in the Down-holland district acted in the same arbitrary manner. These actions caused great resentment and indignation among the labourers. The National Executive endeavoured in every way possible to avoid a strike, as the organization was by no means complete and there were practically no funds, but the men were eager to fight as soon as the



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demands were formulated. The farmers, however, unanimously decided not to recognize the men's Union, but intimated that they were not unwilling to concede, between the busy seasons, a Saturday half-holiday. The majority of the farmers did not want to come to terms with the men. The chairman of the farmers' meeting said that "he felt sure that if they were only a united force they could 'squash' the Union, and take the wind out of the sails of Mr. Edwards, the Secretary" (*Times*, May 24, 1913). All efforts to effect a peaceful solution failed; therefore, the leaders decided on a strike. Between 1,500 and 2,000 farm workers came out.

The strike commenced on June 20th, and lasted about a fortnight. At the beginning of July the Board of Trade intervened, but failed to bring about a settlement. The strike excited widespread attention, and the Union's appeal for funds met with a generous response from the public generally, and especially from Trade Unionists in other industries. Nearly £800 were subscribed from outside sources.

The farm workers received much valuable help from Trade Unionists in Liverpool, who thought the demands of the Union were too modest. Among Trade Union leaders who actively participated in the movement were Messrs. J. A. Seddon (*Chairman Parliamentary Committee Trade Union Congress*); James Sexton (*Dockers' Union*); Joseph Cottar (*National Union of Ships' Stewards*); and many others.

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Not all the farmers were obstinate. Many granted advances in wages and reduced hours immediately. The King was about to commence his Lancashire tour, and was to be the guest of Lord Derby, upon whose estates the men had "downed tools." An attempt was made by the men to induce Lord Derby to bring about a settlement. Lord Derby wrote to the Farmers' Union to say that he would place his services at their disposal if they so wished, and he also consented to meet Mr. James Sexton and Mr. George Edwards the Secretary of the Union. However, he did not intervene in the dispute further than to promise to see the men who were working on his own estates and to discuss the situation with them. As a result of Lord Derby's terms the men on his estate withdrew their notices unconditionally, and returned to work.

During the strike peaceful picketing was carried on with considerable success. Members of the Union met the boats landing Irish labourers at Liverpool, and in many cases succeeded in inducing the immigrants to join the Union. Many Irish labourers who arrived in the district, on finding a strike in progress, passed on to Yorkshire. On July 4th the Ormskirk Branch of the Railwaymen's Union gave forty-eight hours' notice of refusal to handle produce in the affected area. Before the railway workers could actually carry out their threat, the strike was ended by means of a suggestion by the Superintendent of Police at Ormskirk.

The strike ended in a very satisfactory way

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for the men, for, according to the official report of the Union,

“ This is the first time in the history of agricultural labourers they have ever had a reduction of hours. Overtime granted at sixpence per hour. This means during busy seasons an increase of at least 4s. per week, as no overtime has been paid for in the past. Further, since the agitation commenced, a large number of farmers have granted increases in wages from 1s. to 3s. per week.”

During the Lancashire trouble a strike of farm workers took place in Somerset, at East Chinnock. The trouble was mainly due to the action of one of the farmers who sacked two Union men and imported men from another district to take their places. Great resentment was caused by the drafting of large numbers of police into the affected parish. The police were used to protect the farmer and the “ blackleg ” labour, and even to escort them to church. However, in the end the Union succeeded in coming to an agreement with the employers, with the result that an advance of 2s. per week for men and 1s. for lads was secured. Other minor disputes took place in other counties and districts, and, more or less, were settled on advantageous terms to the men.

During 1913 the *Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union* gained nearly 8,000 new members. Lancashire accounted for 2,000 of these, and Norfolk for over 1,000. At the end of the year there were 232 branches scattered throughout 26 counties in England and Wales, with a total

membership of nearly 12,000. The Trade Union Congress (1913) voted £500 to the *Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union* for organizing purposes, £200 being advanced at the close of the year. Mr. George Edwards, the general secretary, "through ill-health and advancing years" resigned his office after the close of the Lancashire strike. Mr. R. B. Walker, his assistant, was elected to fill the vacancy.

In February 1914 trouble arose between masters and men in the village of Helions Bumpstead in North Essex. A branch of the Union, with 41 members, had been formed in the village in October 1913. During the second week of its existence the membership rose to 59, and by the end of January had reached 82. At the outside there were not more than 130 farm workers in the parish, which meant that the Union was becoming what farmers are apt to call "dangerous." Four farmers, after a meeting on market-day at Haverhill, decided to dismiss their men unless they left the Union. Men living in cottages belonging to these farmers received notice to quit. The farmers said if the workers did not give up the Union they and their families would be evicted. To their astonishment the men refused to submit, and walked off the farms declaring that they would not go back without a 2s. rise.

On two occasions the men's representatives asked the farmers to meet them in conference, but the farmers refused. The trouble spread to neighbouring villages, and in June, as a result of a ballot, all

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the men voted in favour of a strike. Between 350 and 400 farm workers—95 per cent. of those employed in the parishes of Ashdon, Helions Bumpstead, Steeple Bumpstead, Sturmer, Ridgewell and Birdbrook came out. Their chief demands were :

Labourers, 16s.

Stockmen, 18s.—20s.

Horsemen, 20s.

Weekly half-holiday.

Holiday on Bank holidays, Christmas Day, and Good Friday.

Overtime, 6d. per hour.

Harvest work, £8 for four weeks and 5s. a day beyond four weeks.

Tied cottages to be held on a three-months' tenancy.

The farmers were placed in an awkward position, because the hay was ready for cutting. Some farmers were obliged to sell their sheep and cows owing to the shortage of labour. It was said that rather than give way, the farmers were prepared to lose the harvest. A London daily described their attitude in the following lines :—

“ Be danged to their impudent cheek—

They want sixteen shillings a week !

But rather than pay

I'll waste all my hay

And thus my revenge on 'em wreak ! ”

In March, the tenants of Lord Leicester's Holkham estate, in Norfolk—a district not directly affected by the strike—agreed to increase the wages of the

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farm workers by 1s. a week. This example was quickly followed on Sir Ailwyn Fellowes' estate at Honningham. The Nottingham Corporation, who farmed nearly 2,000 acres at Stoke Bardolph and Bulcote, decided to advance all wagoners' and labourers' wages by 1s. a week from the first week in April, bringing the wages of the former up to 22s., and the latter to 19s. 6d. a week with free cottages and gardens.

About the same time, His Majesty the King gave all his farm workers on the Sandringham estate an increase of 1s. a week and a weekly half-holiday. The men on neighbouring farms, and particularly those employed by tenants of the King, not unnaturally, sought some improvement in their own conditions of employment. The men came out on strike, demanding "King's wages and King's conditions."

The strike was quite spontaneous, and was begun by the independent action of the workers, though afterwards they received the support of the Union. The moment chosen for the strike was, apparently, not a good one from the farm worker's point of view. Work on the fields was well advanced, and the *Farmers' Federation* assisted the farmers by supplying them with a sufficient number of workers for their immediate needs.

The men's Executive decided not only to support the men on strike, but to issue a demand to the farmers in the North-West Norfolk area for an immediate advance of from 14s. to 16s. a week and a Saturday half-holiday. The President stated



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that the Union was not out to "fight for the sake of fighting." The men did not want to strike, but only to better conditions. He indicated, however, that the men were bent upon getting the matter considered at once, and if the matter was delayed "we should have a very great difficulty in restraining them."

During the Norfolk trouble, the Union started a weekly journal called the *Labourer*, partly to record the progress of the strike and partly as a national experiment. It was decided, after four weekly issues, to continue it as a quarterly.

In April trouble arose on Lord Lilford's estate near Thrapston, Northamptonshire. A Union had been formed in the district during 1913 and 60 farm workers on the estate joined. The men asked for a rise of 1s. a week and a weekly half-holiday. They were told that unless they gave up the Union they must leave their work.

An attempt was made by the local branch secretary to settle the matter with Lord Lilford and his agent, but the attempt was not successful. Lord Lilford said that the question of wages—15s. a week—might be regarded as settled, but he could not give any answer about the Saturday half-holiday which had been demanded. The difficulty of the men was increased by the fact that practically all of them lived in cottages owned by Lord Lilford and therefore they were in danger of being turned out.

Most of the men decided to remain at work, but seven decided to sacrifice their jobs rather

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than leave the Union. These seven men were dismissed, and failed to get fresh employment anywhere upon the Lilford estate.

The action of Lord Lilford and his tenants was condemned in the public press and also by farmers at the meeting of the Farmers' Union.

*The Times*, April 21, 1914, said :—

“ To turn good men off their land merely because they choose to belong to a Union, as we understand that he (Lord Lilford) has done, is to adopt an antiquated attitude wholly out of touch with the current of thought and feeling to-day. He is trying to swim against the stream, which is an exceedingly foolish proceeding. The men have just as much right to belong to the Union if they choose as he has to belong to the Carlton Club.”

The *Mark Lane Express* (June 29, 1914), the official organ of the *National Farmers' Union*, contained the following :—

“ We utterly fail to understand the attitude of the farmers in these localities. We have heard a good deal lately of the blessed word ‘ recognition.’ Whatever it may really mean, might we point out that one weak, ineffective way of recognizing the labourers’ effort to combine is to attempt to kill it by coercive measures ? ”

The dispute spread to many of the neighbouring villages. Eventually the farmers at Raunds came to terms with the men ; other villages followed their example. The terms agreed to at Raunds were the following :—

1. One shilling per week increase in wages for men ;  
6d. per week for boys.

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2. Sixpence per hour overtime for men earning more than 16s. per week; boys under 16, 2d. per hour overtime; boys over 16, 3d. per hour; no beer.
3. Four o'clock stop on Saturdays.
4. Reinstatement of all men.
5. Withdrawal of all notices to quit cottages, and all legal action, if any, arising out of the dispute.
6. Hours of harvest work as usual.
7. All men to work together amicably.

A general settlement was effected in July. It is worth recording that the Union came to be "recognized" even on the Lilford estate, but an exception was made on the home farm. The seven men who were dismissed because they would not give up the Union were not reinstated, but found employment in the district. This fight was a notable victory for the men.

In June 1914, the activities of the Union extended over 26 counties in England and Wales. There were 360 branches, with a total membership of 15,000. The *Manchester Guardian* (June 22nd) stated that owing to the trouble in Norfolk, Essex, and Northamptonshire, the membership was increasing by not less than 600 a week.

Early in 1914 the branches of the Union in the North-West Essex district formed themselves into a Federation called the *North-West Essex Federation*. This body was responsible for projecting the strike in that area, although, after the strike had been declared, the National Executive consented to share the responsibility. About the same time a movement was set on foot among the branches in Lancashire for the purpose of forming a separate

organization. It was felt that organization and cohesion were difficult so long as activities were directed from a distant centre. The new organization was known as the *Dairy Workers' and Rural Workers' Union*. This difficulty was felt in other areas. In Worcestershire a county committee was formed, consisting of representatives from the branches, for the purpose of assisting in the organization and control of the branches within its area.

There was at this time only one other really important Union engaged in organizing farm workers—the *Workers' Union*. This Union was formed originally for the purpose of organizing the unskilled workmen in towns and urban districts.

It will be remembered that this Union in 1899-90 succeeded in organizing farm workers in several counties, and that this branch of the work suffered from the slump in Trade Unionism which occurred in the early nineties.

It was in 1910 that the *Workers' Union* made a fresh start in the rural districts. The Union commenced operations in Staffordshire, Shropshire, Cheshire, and Suffolk. The new effort met with immediate success, and in 1911 the organization spread into other counties. Some idea of the vigour of this Union may be gathered from the fact that between December 1912 and March 1914 nearly 90,000 men, including agricultural labourers, were added to its membership.

The Union had headquarters in London. Councillor John Beard, of Birmingham, was President, Mr. Tom Mann Vice-President, and Mr. Chas.

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Duncan, M.P., General Secretary. The "Farm workers section" was entrusted to Mr. George Dallas, one of the most capable of modern Trade Union officials.

During 1914 a vigorous campaign was organized in the Home Counties. For the agricultural section of the work the Union possessed a van which served the purpose of a lodging for the itinerant organizers and a convenient platform for the purpose of propaganda. The Union, although organized from London, worked on a county basis. The branches within a county sent delegates to a conference held at a convenient time and place, usually the county town. This conference framed the demands of the Union, taking into consideration the special conditions prevailing in the county. The schedule agreed upon by the conference became the farm workers' charter for the county, and was used as a basis for negotiations with the farmer.

Each county schedule differed in some respects, according to the peculiar customs of the county. The Union recognized that a uniform demand would defeat its own ends. In some cases where the agricultural conditions were similar in adjoining counties, one schedule served for the whole area; for instance, at a conference of delegates held at Cirencester, February 28, 1914, a schedule of wages and conditions was drawn up for Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire.

The minimum demanded for ordinary farm workers in these three counties was fixed at 18s. per week for

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a week of 54 hours in the summer, and 50 in the winter, with a half-holiday for Saturday and sixpence an hour overtime. Different wages and hours were fixed for wagoners, cowmen, and shepherds. Arrangements were made for piece-work, hay and corn harvests, threshing days, road allowances for wagoners, boy labour, perquisites, and the tenure of cottages. The Union stipulated that the perquisites for all classes of workmen were to remain as usual, and "all workmen living in cottages to receive six months' notice to quit where tenancy may be terminated by mutual consent."

This method of working on a county basis not only gave a certain amount of local autonomy, but also tended to differentiate between the demands of different counties.

At the commencement of 1914 there were 600 branches of the Union with a membership of nearly 100,000 including farm workers, and during the first half of 1914 the membership increased by leaps and bounds. The funds at the disposal of the Union and the average weekly income at that time greatly exceeded that of any other Union working among agricultural workers. Consequently it was held to be in a position of great strength, because, in case of a strike or lock-out among farm workers, all the Union members would not be affected, and the weekly contributions would pour in from workers in the towns and urban districts. The Union claimed that the combination of the unskilled workers in towns, and the farm workers, tended to check the use of farm



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workers during industrial disputes and the use of unskilled labour in agricultural disputes.

This method of calling conferences in each area for the discussion of wages and conditions generally, usually led to a reasonable and practicable programme. It is interesting to note that this method in many respects very closely anticipated the Wages Boards which were set up by the Government in 1917. A circular convening a conference in Herefordshire in 1914 contained the following excellent advice :—

“ In drawing up a programme it will be well to bear in mind that it must be reasonable, so as, first, to lead the employers to discuss it ; and in the second place, so as to convince the general public that it ought to be conceded at once ; and further, that it should be of such a nature as to secure the greatest enthusiasm and unity amongst the workers themselves.”

In Yorkshire, where one of the demands had been an all-round wage of 24s. a week, after the programme had been in operation for a year, it was decided at a conference in 1914 to modify the demand to one of 22s. a week, “ and thereby avoid any friction with the farmers, who think 24s. excessive.” The conference was confident that this increase would shortly be conceded.

These methods were conciliatory in character, and were meeting with the success they deserved. The Union continued to make rapid progress, and when the war came in August 1914, it could boast of the solid support of thousands of farm workers, and a record of sterling work on behalf

of the worker, who, to use the words of the author of a *Pilgrimage of British Farming* was "much worse paid than his fellows in any other industry."

In 1914 a Union known as the *National Amalgamated Union of Labourers* commenced operations in Kent, and in June a strike was proclaimed. The war diverted attention from agricultural distress. A truce was declared, and the men in all areas returned to work without pressing their claims to higher wages.

What *The Times* said in 1914 (March 6th) was true in August :—

"As a class, however, the agricultural labourers of the country are an unorganized body, incapable of concerted action in a national strike movement, for comparatively few of them are enrolled on the books of a Trade Union."

## CHAPTER III

### THE TRUCE

*"Liberty, let others despair of you—I never despair of you."*

THE war overshadowed all domestic problems, but even before the Mons Retreat farmers' grumbles were heard on the "home front." Enlistment, and attractions of better pay in alternative employment tended to accentuate the shortage of skilled labour on farms. What did the farmer do? Did he raise wages? No; he commenced to clamour for the workers' children to be released from school. The Government of the day allowed the children to be taken, and this concession had the effect of encouraging farmers to hope that its legalization in the spring would tide them over their difficulties and enable them to avoid paying higher wages to those men who remained.

Early in 1915 Farmers' Unions commenced an active campaign for the premature release of children of school age. Farm workers were leaving the farms to take up industrial pursuits. They would have been retained if farmers had offered

higher wages. The remedy in the farmers' mind was not higher wages, but more children. According to the Board of Education the wages paid to children varied "below a maximum of 7s. a week." The President of the Board of Education, in reply to a deputation, said (February 11, 1915) "it was rather a curious fact that where wages had been highest there had been shown no tendency on the part of farmers to demand the help of children, but where cheap labour was required the children were withdrawn." Mr. R. E. Prothero, M.P., speaking in the House of Commons (February 25, 1915) said: "Whatever the farmer thought twenty years ago, he is now in favour of education." Had he looked up the reports of farmers' meetings he would not have made such a statement. At the annual meeting of the *Devon Farmers' Union* one member thought that "a cause of the shortage of farm labour was that children were educated above their position" (*Mark Lane Express*, February 1, 1915).

A farmer, speaking at the annual meeting of the *North Berkshire Branch of the National Farmers' Union*, said "this was not the time to talk about keeping boys at school and over-educating them—that had been done too long—but it was the time for agriculturists to press their demands" (*Mark Lane Express*, February 8th).

A well-known Westerdale farmer, speaking at the annual dinner of the *Castleton Farmers' Protection Association*, said "Boys were being over-educated" and "to prohibit the employment

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of scholars on the land was taking away from farmers the supply of labour at its source" (*Yorkshire Herald*, March 8th).

At a meeting of the *Darlington, Durham, and North Riding Chamber of Agriculture*, February 5, 1915, one farmer said "the longer they [the children] went to school the less inclined they would be to work." The Chairman was reported to have said: "If they keep the boys or girls at school till the age of fourteen, nine out of ten would say they would not go to manual work; they would say they were educated and wanted to earn a living with their brains and not with their hands" (*Yorkshire Daily Post*, February 16, 1915).

There were many farm workers who welcomed the opportunity of adding to the family income by means of the early employment of their children. But, on the other hand, those who objected were not always able to keep their children at school. The tied cottage system, in some instances, made resistance impossible. A witness at the *Caversham Petty Sessions* said that her boy had been employed by "order" of the squire.

There were a few enlightened farmers who did not share the prevalent views on child education. For instance, at a meeting of the *Liverpool and District Farmers' Club* a farmer said "It was very necessary that boys should be properly educated; for an educated labourer was of better value than an uneducated one." It will be noted that this opinion came from a district where farm workers received a relatively high wage.

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Did farmers seriously try to get adult labour? The Board of Agriculture made arrangements with Labour Exchanges in order to assist the farmers in obtaining labour from the towns. But a great many farmers would not use the Exchanges. They complained that they could not get skilled labour by these means; yet they did not mind taking cheap, unskilled child labour!

The Secretary of the *North Herefordshire Farmers' Union* said "The Chairman of the Bromyard Branch recently had a conversation with the manager of the Worcester Exchange, who told him that he had plenty of English labourers who were willing to work in the country, but not at the present rate of wages" (*Hereford Times*, February 27, 1915).

Even the *Morning Post*, while condoning the use of child labour, said: "The farmer has come to depend too much on cheap and casual labour, casual because it is cheap and cheap because it is casual" (March 6, 1915).

Among those who took up the cause of the children was the *Workers' National Committee*, which body, after investigation, arrived at the following conclusions:—

"We are of opinion that until substantial advances in wages have been offered no proposal to substitute either child or female labour should be considered.

"We therefore support the Agricultural Labourers' Union in their demand for better wages before any other source of supply is considered."



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The Bishop of Oxford, in a letter published in *The Times* of March 5th, wrote :—

“ To meet the shortage by withdrawing boys prematurely from school on a large scale is a disastrously reactionary measure, which it will be hard to reverse.”

Canon Scott Holland contributed a vigorous article in *The Commonwealth*.

“ There is no class,” he wrote, “ more terribly in danger of missing its heritage than the agricultural labourers’ boys. There is no class more ready to skimp their hold upon it than the farmers. There are half a dozen ways out of the difficulties in which the agricultural labourer is placed. A decent wage would bring men in out of the trades that are suffering by the war.”

A correspondent to *Country Life* summed up the farmers’ attitude when he sneered about “ *putting a relatively fine edge on very ordinary iron.*” Farm workers’ children were regarded as “ very ordinary iron.” A Shropshire branch of the Union wrote :—

“ We poor labourers have as much respect for our children as the farmer, of whose sons there are some going to school in Shropshire at 14, 15, 16, 17, and not called on to do the least little job because they are farmers’ sons, and yet they are asking for ours without the parents’ consent.”

“ The fine edge ” was quite the correct thing for farmers’ children : they were something better than “ ordinary iron.” Farmers’ objection to the “ fine edge ” on the “ ordinary iron ” is that it would be difficult to temper it in order to stand the

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blunting process so necessary for producing what they conceive as the right kind of farm worker.

However, the farmers had their way. The Government of the day responded to the meanest agitation of modern times by legalizing the release of school-children between the age of 12 and 14 years. The French Government, on the other hand, issued to the local educational authorities in that country a circular containing the following passage :—

“ The existing laws on the attendance of boys at school must be maintained this year with more strictness than ever. . . . It would be disgraceful to see children robbed of their education as if the military service of their fathers had left them only the choice between beggary and premature wage-labour.”

As to wages, in cases which the present writer investigated in April 1915, he found instances in Cambridgeshire, Wiltshire, and Worcestershire where the increase in total earnings since August 1914 was only a shilling a week ! Instances from ten counties revealed the fact that the highest war increase had been 2s. a week. Yet cost of living had already risen by 20 per cent., which would require a rise of 3s. on a 15s. wage to enable the labourer to live on a pre-war scale.

“ At Thetford County Court the judge said that in some cases in Norwich that came before him the agricultural labourers only received threepence per hour. That did not seem to be a wage upon which a man could very well keep a family ” (*Richmond Herald*, February 27, 1915).

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There was a great deal of unrest among farm workers at this time, and rumours of strikes came from Norfolk, Herefordshire, and Yorkshire. In Norfolk a serious strike was threatened. A thousand members of the *National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union* gave notice that they would cease work on March 13th unless the *Farmers' Federation* consented to meet the Union representatives, and to grant a considerable increase in wages. The *Farmers' Federation* met all the overtures of the Union with a stubborn determination to concede nothing, although many farmers admitted that, owing to the increased price of food, the workers' claims were not unreasonable.

Towards the end of February things looked about as black as they could be. The General Secretary of the Union stated on February 25th: "At the moment I can see nothing but open rupture staring us in the face." It was generally agreed that a rupture would have been a calamity at such a juncture of the national history, because the cessation of farm work would have hindered the production of food over a considerable area of cultivation. At the eleventh hour a settlement was arranged, and a compromise effected. Five of the largest farmers in Norfolk agreed to meet five representatives of the Union, in order, if possible, to arrive at an amicable agreement. The result was a friendly settlement, and the strike was averted.

The farmers at the conference pledged the Union

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representatives to raise the farm workers' wages to 18s. a week. This represented an advance of 3s. a week on pre-war wages. The other farmers of Norfolk were asked to fall into line with the decision of the conference. With a few exceptions, most of the farmers remained loyal to this arrangement. Thus the farm workers won a "bloodless victory."

But some of the farmers in the Swanton Morley district failed to abide by the decision, and it was not until fifty or sixty men had been on strike for nearly a fortnight that they agreed to pay the 18s.

In reviewing this period it appears almost incredible that English farmers, who were supposed to be an intensely patriotic class of men, should have resisted the farm workers' claim for better treatment at a time when the national interest required that unity should prevail among all classes at home. No reasonable person would maintain that the farm workers' demands were excessive, especially when it is remembered that farmers were doing exceedingly well. They were getting higher prices for their produce; for instance, as early as February 1915 the average price of British wheat was 60s. a quarter, or nearly double the average price obtained in February 1914; the price of oats had risen during the same period by over 50 per cent. and barley by nearly 25 per cent. Cost of living had risen by 20 cent., yet the farmers were unwilling to advance wages, and the farm workers had to resort to a strike

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before the farmers would concede a rise of 3s. a week on a wage of 15s.

As time went on, farmers' difficulties with regard to the supply of skilled labour, instead of getting better, grew worse. The farmer's predicament only emphasized his dependence upon the skilled farm worker. The nation, too, began to realize that Agriculture was the backbone of national well-being, and that the industry itself depended almost entirely upon the skilled labour of the unobtrusive, long-suffering, sweated farm worker.

The authorities, who at first had shown little discrimination in calling up the men under the Derby scheme, eventually decided to "star" certain special classes of workers. "Starred" men were not to be called up unless the recruiting officer could prove that such men had been improperly or unnecessarily "starred."

But farm workers continued to migrate to better paid employment. For instance, they were taken on at Gretna for excavation work. The inference was that the "unskilled navvy labour" was being paid higher wages than the indispensable farm worker. The obvious thing to do was to offer farm workers inducements to stay on the farms. But this did not present itself to the Cumberland farmers as the right way out of the difficulty. They preferred to send resolutions to Whitehall imploring the Government to prevent farm workers from leaving the farms.

Lord Selborne, the Minister of Agriculture,

replied that "if a skilled farm hand, who is on the starred list leaves his employment on a farm in order to work at another trade, the arrangement by which he is exempted from being recruited for the army will no longer apply."

This decision was perfectly sound from the point of view of national interest, but it was grossly unfair not to stipulate that farmers should pay higher wages to men who were stated to be indispensable to the nation. It placed farmers in a privileged position as compared with other employers of labour; it prevented the worker from getting a market value for the only commodity he had to sell, namely, his labour. The farmer was allowed to get full market value for all his commodities; but that, of course, was only proper: to have interfered with the farmers' market would have violated the sacred law of supply and demand.

However, the "starring" of the workers did not improve matters very much. Recourse was had to the employment of soldiers on the land. There was a good deal of hesitancy at first on the part of farmers to employ soldiers. Certainly, unless special care was exercised in the selection of the men detailed off to work on the land, soldier labour, as such, was not likely to be "skilled" labour. Any given platoon would contain clerks, piano-tuners, dockers, watchmakers, etc., but very few who had worked on the land at any time, and fewer still who had acquired a degree of skill in what after all is a very skilled employment. But by the use of soldier labour a new principle was



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introduced into agriculture, namely, definite wages and hours. The farmer resented this very much ; but the authorities very rightly insisted on a definite wage being paid for a fixed number of hours. In many districts this wage was higher than that paid to the skilled farm workers, and the hours of labour shorter. This was awkward for the farmers, who perhaps would not have raised such an outcry against soldier labour had it been as cheap as ordinary farm labour.

After mishandling the problem for a long time, the military authorities showed greater discernment in the selection of soldiers sent to work on the land. On the whole, during the latter part of 1917, soldier labour improved greatly in quality. Farmers were able to "carry on," and greatly to increase the area of cultivation, by means of soldiers, prisoners of war, the Women's National Land Service Corps, and the part-time labour of village women. The last was far the most important of the sources of emergency labour.

The need for a greater production of food was brought home with special force to the Government by the deadly effects of the enemy submarine campaign in the early part of 1917. To combat the submarine menace it was of the utmost importance that every inch of farm land should be made to produce to its fullest capacity, and also that new areas of land should be brought under cultivation. The Government appealed to the farmers to do their utmost to produce more food. Here was a chance for farmers to attain a high level

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of patriotism, an opportunity of consolidating the "home front." They were asked to risk, not their lives, but their capital. Were they willing to accept the risk? Yes—at a price! That price was to be definite and statutory, not a mere promise: it was to be guaranteed, and fixed by Act of Parliament.

The farmers were in a strong position, a position as strong as that held by thousands of civilians in August 1914, who might have consented to risk their lives in the defence of the nation only at a price, a price much higher than a shilling a day! In fairness to farmers it should be recorded that they were only imitating the industrial capitalists who undertook to supply ships and other munitions of war, all of whom exacted their "pound of flesh."

The "bond" is known as the *Corn Production Act*, 1917. Part I, Section 2, Clause 1 of the Act reads:—

The following minimum prices shall be fixed for the wheat and oats of the following years:—

Crop for Year.		WHEAT, Price per Quarter.		OATS, Price per Quarter.	
1917	..	..	60s.	..	38s. 6d.
1918	}	..	55s.	..	32s.
1919					
1920	}	..	45s.	..	24s.
1921					
1922					

The difference between average market price and the minimum price stated in the Act is paid to

the farmer each year out of taxes. The average price of wheat or oats is to be reckoned as "the average price for the seven months from the first day of September in that year ascertained by adding together the weekly averages of the weeks included in those seven months, and dividing the total by the number of weeks."

Part III of the Act deals with the restriction of Agricultural Rents. The rent payable must "not exceed such rent as could have been obtained if Part I of the Act had not been in force." Until Part I of the Act comes into operation, Part III cannot be applied. As the average prices for corn have maintained a level much higher than the minima stated in the Act, there has been no occasion for farmers to apply for the bounty, or for landowners to be restricted in the raising of agricultural rents. Even should Part I of the Act be applied, the provision as to the restriction of rents is of doubtful value. Farms have recently been sold at enormously enhanced prices, and it will be difficult to make Part III of the Act apply to the future rents of such farms.

In Part IV of the Act the Board of Agriculture reserves power to enforce proper cultivation. If the Board are of opinion

(a) that any land is not being cultivated according to the rules of good husbandry ; or

(b) that for the purpose of increasing in the national interest the production of food the mode of cultivating any land or the use to which any land is being put should be changed,

they may require the occupier to "cultivate the land in accordance with such directions as the Board may give for securing that the cultivation shall be according to the rules of good husbandry or for securing the necessary change in the mode of cultivating or in the use of the land" or may "enter on and take possession of the land."

Not the least important part of this very remarkable Act is Part II, which provides for a minimum rate of agricultural wages. Unlike the farmers, the farm workers were unable to bring organized pressure to bear upon the Government. The farm workers did not say to the Government, "We refuse to cultivate the soil unless we get our price." The minimum wage of 25s. a week provided for in the Act did not, in fact, constitute a bare living wage, having regard to the increase in the cost of living. Moreover, farmers were in a position to be able to pay a much higher wage than the minimum stated in the Act. The average price of wheat, barley, and oats (June 1917 to May 1918) was 73s. 3d., 61s. 4d., and 49s. 10d. a quarter respectively. In 1913-14 the average price per quarter was: wheat 31s. 9d., barley 26s. 7d., and oats 18s. 8d.

In the Report of the Committee which inquired into the *Financial Results of the Occupation of Agricultural Land* (Cd. 76, 1919) there is an analysis of the income and expenditure on twenty-six farms for the five years ended 1917-18. After paying all outgoings, including increased cost of feeding stuffs, implements, labour, etc., the profit

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per acre had increased by over 350 per cent. Wages during the same period, on the same farms, had increased by only 56 per cent. per acre.

Mr. Wilson Fox estimated in 1902 that the average weekly value of food consumed by farm workers' families, comprising two adults and four children, was 13s. 6½d. The same amount of food cost 15s. 9¾d. in 1912, and in the period March-June 1918 no less than 28s. 11½d. was required to purchase similar articles of food in the same quantities.<sup>1</sup> This estimate provided for food only, and did not include rent, firing, light, clothes, insurance, beer, tobacco, amusements or newspapers. The Government of the day, which was in a position to command the facts, while providing for a liberal dole for farmers, inserted the beggarly sum of 25s. a week as the minimum rate of wages for farm workers.

Fortunately the Act did not fix maximum rates of wages, although the Committee which reported on *Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture* (Cd. 24) stated that in the first part of 1918 there was a "tendency among farmers to regard the minimum as the maximum also, and to pay the same rate of wages to all men."

From the farm workers' point of view the most valuable part of the Act is Part II Section 5, which provides for the establishment of an *Agricultural Wages Board*. Under the Act the Wages Board is empowered to fix minimum rates for time work, piece work, or both—"any such minimum rates

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix No. III.

may be fixed so as to apply universally to workmen employed in agriculture, or to any special class of workmen in agriculture, or to any special area, or to any special class in a special area, subject in each case to any exceptions which may be made by the Agricultural Wages Board for employment of any special character, and so as to vary according as the employment is for a day, week, month, or other period, or according to the number of working hours or the conditions of the employment, or so as to provide for a differential rate in the case of overtime." The Act also states that less than the minimum rates can be fixed in the case of a man who is "affected by any mental or other infirmity or physical injury which renders him incapable of earning that minimum rate."

In fixing the minimum rates for able-bodied men the Wages Board is to secure, "so far as practicable," that the wages are "adequate to promote efficiency and to enable a man in an ordinary case to maintain himself and his family in accordance with such standard of comfort as may be reasonable in relation to the nature of his occupation."

Further, it is part of the duty of the Wages Board to define the value of "benefits or advantages." In future the minimum wage must be reckoned in cash, and deductions from the cash minimum on account of part payments in kind can only be made in the case of certain specified "benefits and advantages," the quantity and



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quality of which have to be clearly defined. Some of these benefits have been defined by the *Agricultural Wages Board* (A.W. 311), and a basis of valuation fixed. For these specified allowances declaration can be made. Other allowances must be regarded merely as gifts. This will clear up what has always been a matter for controversy in agriculture. Henceforth both farmer and worker will know exactly what wages are to be paid.

The constitution and proceedings of the *Agricultural Wages Board* are outlined in the first schedule of the Act, and are determined by Regulations of the *Board of Agriculture and Fisheries*, dated November 8, 1917, and subsequent orders.

The Wages Board consists of 39 persons, 32 of whom are representatives, the rest being appointed by the Board of Agriculture. Of the appointed members, one at least is a woman. The Chairman and Deputy-Chairman are appointed by the Board of Agriculture from among the members of the Wages Board.

The farmers and farm workers are each entitled to send sixteen representatives. Of these, eight are official representatives of the various farmers' organizations, and eight are official representatives of the farm workers' Unions. The remaining eight representatives of each side are selected by the Board of Agriculture from names submitted by bodies of farmers and bodies of farm workers respectively. In the regulations both the farmers and farm workers' Unions are definitely recognized.

With commendable despatch the Wages Board

set about a difficult and onerous task in a broad-minded and businesslike manner. It proceeded at once, in co-operation with the Board of Agriculture, to set up District Wages Committees covering every county in England and Wales. With one or two exceptions in England the "district" is the county area. In Wales counties were grouped to form the "Districts." These District Wages Committees consist of an equal number of representatives of employers and workmen and a number (not exceeding a quarter of the whole number of representatives) of impartial persons appointed by the Board of Agriculture. The District Wages Committees recommend to the Central Wages Board the minimum rates applicable to their districts. The first order under the Act came into operation in Norfolk on May 20, 1918.

Minimum rates were fixed for each county in England and Wales both for male and female workers according to age groups. In addition to fixing the minimum rates of wages, the maximum number of hours to be worked for the minimum rate was also given, and the rate per hour for all overtime. These rates, as published, become law, and any employer paying less than the minimum rates to any but an exempted worker is liable to a fine not exceeding £20.

By March 1919 no county rate was less than 30s. a week for a male farm worker of 21 years and over. The rates for ordinary farm workers ranged from 30s. to 36s. 6d. (exclusive of overtime),<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix No II.

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while for special classes such as horsemen, cowmen, head carters, shepherds, etc., the rates ranged from 34s. to 43s. a week, not reckoning overtime. Owing to representations made by the farm workers' Unions, the Wages Board conceded a further rise. The new rates came into force on May 19, 1919, and provided for a minimum wage of 36s. 6d. per week for a six-day week of 54 hours, to be reduced to 50 hours in October. This minimum applied to all classes of able-bodied male workers over 21 years of age.

Thus by setting up a Wages Board the *Corn Production Act* has encompassed a revolution in Agriculture, the effects of which are only just beginning to be felt. Some of its immediate effects will be considered in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE AWAKENING

*" All the past we leave behind,  
We debouch upon a newer mightier world, varied world,  
Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labour and  
the march."*

IN the preceding chapters an attempt has been made to follow the historical development of village Trade Unions, to describe the conditions which called them into being, and to indicate the main reasons why they failed permanently to improve the status of the farm worker. This general survey has brought out at least one salient feature, a characteristic of all farm workers' efforts at combination—instability.

Between 1912 and 1914 there appeared to be a steady progression in organization, which led many to hope that at last the farm workers were going to build up a really effective and stable organization. The war intervened and crushed those hopes to the ground. But to close students of agricultural Trade Unions there appeared to be very little ground for optimism. The new

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## T H E            A W A K E N I N G

Unions resembled the old in almost every particular. There was no new factor in the situation. The farm worker was still as difficult to organize. True, he was if anything better educated, and politically more sophisticated. But the old vicious circle still remained: wages were low because the farm worker remained unorganized, and he remained unorganized because he could not afford to keep up the weekly contributions to a Union. Again, the opportunities for social intercourse in the villages had not improved to any appreciable extent; the farm worker, in the main, still remained an isolated worker, rarely meeting his fellows in association. The hopes inspired by the introduction of Parish Councils, and the extension of the franchise in Local Government, were proved by experience to be illusory. Mr. Prothero could write, quite truthfully, in 1912 that "the sense of social inferiority has impressed the labourer with the feeling that he is not regarded as a member of the community, but only as its helot."

Mr. George Edwards said in 1912: "Forty years' experience has convinced me that the labourers cannot get a living wage by Trade-Union effort alone. The difficulties of organization are so great that we cannot get an organization strong enough to enforce it." What was the explanation? Why was it that the Unions seemed to rise on a wave of enthusiasm and then to descend sharply into a trough of depression? The explanation is to be found in one word—fear.

The difficulty with all farm workers' Unions

has been to keep them steady. The farm worker is not easily roused ; he is slow to move ; but when he moves, he wants something to happen quickly. Most of the strikes were started by local branches on their own initiative, and these ill-considered acts have on several occasions brought the Unions near to ruin. What was at the root of this instability ? Fear. The farm worker was haunted by the fear of the farmer and the land-owner. Merely to join a Union was regarded by his superiors as a crime. He knew the farmer would not tolerate a Unionist in his employ, that the squire would mark him down as a suspicious person, and that the parson would most likely side with the squire and farmer.

These were the real and permanent influences in village life. The Unions, perhaps, had gained a footing in the village years ago, and had vanished, leaving the farm worker to his own fate. Perhaps he, or his fellows, had been turned out of their cottages for association with the Union in earlier days. Town-dwellers can hardly appreciate the amount of personal courage required to oppose the settled ideas with count for so much in village life. Courage is akin to fear. The farm worker having dared so much, quickly became a victim of fear. He knew the farmers would retaliate soon enough ; so he acted on the philosophy that " Thrice armed is he who gets his blow in first." The time chosen was often the wrong time, with the result that the strike proved, in the long run, to be ineffective.



# T H E            A W A K E N I N G

At present the farm workers are in high spirits. They are joining their Unions at the rate of thousands a month. Dozens of new branches are being started every week. It is not uncommon for the majority of farm workers in a village to join the Union at the first visit of the organizer. In villages where Unionism has never before gained a footing are to be found some of the strongest branches. The farm workers have thrown fear to the winds. What is the explanation?

There can be no doubt that the organization of the Agricultural Wages Board and District Committees is directly responsible for this boom. Mr. R. B. Walker, the General Secretary of the *National Agricultural Labourers and Rural Workers' Union*, in an interview acknowledged this. He said :—

“ It is true to say the Corn Production Act has undoubtedly provided an incentive to the labourer to organize, whereby through his Union he would be able to secure the benefits that the Act, or orders made under the Act, might give him.”

Mr. George Dallas, of the *Workers' Union*, said :—

“ The need for representation on the bodies for fixing wages made organization essential. The representatives come back and report to their branches, and the branches see that the representatives are in possession of all the facts. Men join the Union in order to be represented and because they are beginning to see the fruits of organization.”

One of the arguments advanced by the *Land Enquiry Committee*, which reported in 1913 in

## VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS

favour of a Wages Board, was "the representation of farmers and labourers on such a Board would lead to better organization on both sides." This was a prophecy which experience of the Trades Boards had justified. The direct outcome of the establishment of an Agricultural Wages Board has been a wonderful growth in Unionism.

Numbers of farmers, to whom Unionism was anathema, have come to look upon the organization of the farm workers as a necessary factor. There are, of course, exceptions, but on the whole the large majority are beginning to recognize that union is essential for both sides. The farmer is a member of a powerful Union. In addition to the Farmers' Union there are Chambers of Agriculture and Farmers' Clubs, which also serve farmers' interests. The farmer has realized the advantages to be secured through combination, and he cannot very well deny the worker the right also to be represented by an organization.

The two chief workmen's organizations are the *National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union* and the *Workers' Union*, which latter organization has incorporated two other rural unions, which also included town workers in their ranks, namely, *The National Amalgamated Union* and the *Dairy Workers' and Rural Workers' Union*. There are one or two other Unions at work in England, but their membership is insignificant. These two large Unions have each a membership much larger than the combined membership of any previous farm workers' Unions.

## T H E            A W A K E N I N G

*The National Agricultural and Rural Workers' Union* has branches in every county in England and Wales and a membership (July 1919) of considerably more than 100,000 distributed over more than 2,000 branches. New branches are being formed every week, and the membership is rapidly increasing.

The *Workers' Union* also has branches in every county and has enrolled over 100,000 farm workers in its ranks ; its general membership is over 600,000, and is still growing. This Union, embracing as it does all kinds of workers, has an income of £7,000 a week and a financial reserve of £300,000. Farm workers are also to be found within the ranks of the *Dockers' Union*, *The Union of Municipal Employees*, *The National Union of Gasworkers*, and even in the *Union of Co-operative Employees*. At present, July 1919, nearly 250,000 farm workers are paying into a Union. If this rate of progress is maintained for another year, the farm worker will be one of the most closely organized wage-earners in the United Kingdom.

Part II Section 5 of the Corn Production Act may well be described as the farm workers' charter. It is not so much the setting up of a minimum wage as the creation of Wages Boards that has stimulated Unionism. For the first time in history the farm worker has been invited to state his case through his accredited representatives. There is no doubt that the insertion in the Act of a paltry 25s. minimum drove thousands into Unions who might not have joined had a really adequate mini-

## VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS

mum been provided. However, the recognition of the legal right to a minimum rate of wages and the establishment of representative bodies for the purpose of determining the rates for the various counties gave the farm worker his chance. He has risen nobly to the opportunity.

The Representative Committees have opened up an entirely new chapter. The Unions are frankly recognized, and farm workers and farmers have to be represented in equal proportions. Jack is as good as his master. Unlike representation on Parish, District and County Councils, the worker has as good a chance of stating his case as the farmer. He has become really articulate. Observers tell of the wonderful change that has come over farm workers since they have been members of the District Committees. At first they seemed afraid to speak, were diffident and reserved. A few meetings produced remarkable changes. The farm worker proved himself to be as skilful in negotiation as the farmers. Both farmer and workmen have benefited by the opportunity of coming face to face with each other in conference.

What grounds are there for hoping that the new Unionism will prove more stable than the old? The answer is to be found in the *Corn Production Act*. The Wages Board and District Committees will act as stabilizers. The farm workers have realized the importance of organized representation on such bodies; by means of their organizations they have been able to exert considerable influence on the decisions arrived at by the Wages Board.

## T H E            A W A K E N I N G

Centrally the Unions have been instrumental in raising minimum rates from 25s. a week to 36s. 6d. for a working week of 50 hours, while locally in many instances rates much higher than the rates scheduled for the districts have been obtained.

Unlike the old Union agreements with farmers, the new rates cannot be evaded with impunity. The farmer who attempts to pay less than the scheduled rates without a special permit from the Wages Board, commits a punishable offence.

In addition to higher rates, many other benefits have been secured. These are successes which the farm worker will not quickly forget. Much more remains to be accomplished, and it is only by organization that further progress can be attained.

The farm worker is fully conscious of the fact that the Wages Board will not bring him the full emancipation which has to come. He is looking forward to the time when he will be able to take his share in the control of the industry in which he is such an important partner. Already he is demanding that a full inquiry shall be made into the organization and management of the industry. The example of the *Coal Commission* has not escaped the notice of the farm worker. He knows (none better) that a reorganized Agriculture can be made to serve the interest of the whole community without dooming him always to remain a mere wage-earner. At his conferences the farm worker is calling upon the nation to reform its land laws in the interests of agriculture.

## VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS

At a *Workers' Union* conference held at Oxford in June 1919 it was affirmed that it was "essential to the well-being of the whole country" that a reform be effected in the present system of Land Ownership.

At a National Conference of the *Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union* (April, 1919), delegates from every county in England and Wales recorded their opinion that "no adequate solution of the rural problem is possible so long as the land is privately owned."

The farm worker no longer feels that in joining a Union he becomes a member of an unlawful body. He can attend his branch meeting in broad daylight, and need no longer stand in the shadow at an open-air meeting at night. Before very long it will be as uncommon to find a non-Unionist as it was to find a Unionist five years ago. There will be no return to the bad old days. The Unions have come to stay. The farm worker now regards himself as a member of the community, not its helot. Only those in touch with the present movement can really conceive the mighty awakening that has taken place.

Those who have returned from the war have learnt much during their absence from the villages. These men are determined not to endure the old order of things. They remember the value placed upon them by the politicians in their speeches. They know that the politicians blurted out the truth when the nation was in danger.



## T H E                    A W A K E N I N G

The farm workers are quite as much awake as the farmers ; they know the farmers' case as well as their own. It is no use for farmers to bury their heads in the sand ; they must face the problem, and do a bit of thinking. The farm worker is not going to be ignored, or to be put off with half measures. He is in earnest. He knows what he wants, and means to get it. Not only in the industrial field, but in the political field the power of the organized farm workers will be felt. The rural divisions are going to provide a surprise for the politicians when the elections come along. Already this influence has been felt in the District Council elections. Nor are the farm workers ignorant of the important part that the County Councils are going to play in the administration of the country. Politically the farm worker is wide awake. In Union he has found his strength.

To move among the farm workers, to attend their meetings, conferences, branch meetings, and demonstrations is to come into direct contact with a force such as has never before been felt in the villages. One feels that its potency is derived from its sanity : it is virile and intelligent. One doesn't tremble before it ; it is not violent or explosive, but steady and persistent. The farm worker is awake and articulate, his eyes are opened, and he is talking about the things that concern him most, the things he understands best—the facts concerning his industry, and the conditions under which he has to live.

## VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS

The lines of George Loveless, the pioneer of Village Trade Unions, voice the aspirations of the modern farm workers :—

By reason, union, justice, law,  
We claim the birthright of our sires,  
We raise the watchword liberty  
We will, we will, we will be free !

## NOTE ON AUTHORITIES

THE best and most reliable authority on the farm worker in the nineteenth century is Dr. W. Hasbach. His book *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer* (1906) is a classical example of thoroughness, and also contains full references to the sources of information, which have been invaluable to the present writer. Miss O. Jocelyn Dunlop's book *The Farm Labourer. The History of a Modern Problem*, brings the history down to 1912.

References to the first Union and to the revolt of the Seventies are to be found in Sidney Webb's *History of Trade Unionism*, and a graphic account of the conditions of the farm worker in the Thirties and Forties is contained in Frederick Engels' *Condition of the Working Classes in 1844*. The following works (all out of print) deal fully with the movement in the Seventies and Eighties: *Joseph Arch: the story of his life told by himself*; *The English Peasantry*, and *The 'Romance' of Peasant Life in the West of England*, (1872) by F. G. Heath; *The Revolt of the Field*, by Arthur Clayden; and *Land Reform*, by the Right Hon. Jesse Collings. Several sympathetic references to

## VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS

the Unions are made by Professor Thorold Rogers in *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*. *British Farming Past and Present*, by Mr. R. E. Prothero (Lord Ernle), should be consulted in order to get an all-round view of the question. In addition, there are the reports of innumerable *Royal Commissions*, *Select Committees*, *Poor Law Commissioners*, etc.

# A P P E N D I X I

## APPENDIX I

These Tables were compiled by Mr. R. E. Prothero (now Lord Ernle) and form part of Appendix X of his book *English Farming Past and Present* (Longmans, 1912). He notes that "this Table does not include Payments for Piece or Task Work; the occupation of Cottages, with or without gardens, free or at rents below the letting value; harvest earnings, overtime money, or any extra allowances in Kind or Cash. Wages of those having the care of animals are not included."

Divisions and Counties.		Average Weekly Wages of ordinary Agricultural Labourers.									
		1837.	1850-1.	1860.	1869-70.	1872.	1882.	1892.	1898.	1910.	
(i) <i>Eastern and North-Eastern.</i>		s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	
Bedford ..	..	9 6	9 0	10 3	11 1	12 0	12 6	12 0	12 6	13 6	
Cambridge ..	..	9 6	—	10 0	11 0	—	12 6	12 0	12 0	12 8	
Essex..	..	10 4	8 0	11 3	11 4	15 9	12 6	11 6	12 0	13 9	
Hertford ..	..	9 6	9 0	10 0	11 3	12 3	13 6	11 6	12 6	14 8	
Huntingdon ..	..	9 6	8 6	10 9	10 6	12 6	12 0	12 6	12 6	13 8	
Lincoln ..	..	12 0	10 0	13 0	13 11	—	14 3	14 6	14 3	15 6	
Norfolk ..	..	10 4	8 0	10 7	10 5	13 4	12 6	12 0	11 6	12 4	
Suffolk ..	..	10 4	7 11	10 7	10 10	13 0	12 6	12 0	10 6	12 9	
East Riding ..	..	12 0	12 0	13 6	—	—	15 0	15 6	16 0	16 11	
Average ..	..	10 4	9 1	11 1	11 3	13 2	13 0	12 7	12 8	14 0	

# VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS

## APPENDIX I—continued.

Divisions and Counties.	Average Weekly Wages of ordinary Agricultural Labourers.											
	1837.	1850-1.	1860.	1869-70.	1872.	1882.	1892.	1898.	1910.			
(ii) <i>South-Eastern and East Angles Midland.</i>	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.			
	—	7 6	10 0	10 7	14 0	12 0	10 6	11 6	13 2			
	8 0	8 6	—	—	—	14 0	—	13 6	14 8			
	9 6	9 0	12 0	10 10	13 8	12 0	11 6	12 0	13 9			
	12 0	12 0	12 0	14 3	15 2	16 6	14 6	14 6	16 4			
	10 0	—	13 0	13 2	16 6	13 0	14 3	15 0	15 9			
	10 6	—	—	—	—	15 6	—	16 0	17 10			
	9 0	9 0	11 0	11 10	16 0	—	14 0	13 6	14 1			
	12 0	10 0	12 9	13 4	—	16 6	15 0	15 0	17 3			
	9 0	9 0	—	—	—	13 3	12 0	11 6	12 0			
	9 0	—	—	12 6	16 0	—	—	14 6	15 9			
	10 6	9 6	12 9	13 9	14 0	15 0	15 0	15 0	16 4			
	10 7	10 6	11 8	12 2	13 4	13 6	12 0	14 0	14 10			
	10 0	8 6	10 9	12 0	15 0	14 0	11 6	14 0	14 4			
Average	10 0	9 5	11 9	12 5	14 10	14 1	13 0	13 10	15 1			
(iii) <i>West Midland and South- Western.</i>	10 0	—	11 0	11 0	13 0	14 6	14 0	14 0	14 6			
	8 0	—	9 2	10 0	11 0	13 0	13 6	13 0	13 9			
	7 6	7 6	9 4	9 4	10 4	11 0	10 0	11 0	11 11			
	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..			
	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..			



# A P P E N D I X I

Hereford ..	8 0	—	9 0	10 3	12 5	13 0	—	12 0	13 3
Monmouth ..	10 6	—	11 8	13 1	17 9	12 0	—	15 0	16 6
Shropshire ..	9 0	—	10 0	11 0	14 3	13 0	14 0	14 0	14 8
Somerset ..	8 8	—	10 0	10 6	14 0	13 0	11 0	12 6	13 6
Wilts.. ..	8 0	7 0	9 6	10 7	11 5	12 0	10 0	11 6	12 9
Worcester ..	9 6	—	10 0	11 11	13 0	13 6	12 0	14 0	14 2
Average ..	8 10	7 2	9 11	10 10	13 1	12 10	11 10	12 11	13 19
(iv) North and North-Western.									
Chester ..	13 0	—	11 8	14 0	15 9	—	15 0	—	17 0
Cumberland ..	12 0	13 0	15 0	15 3	18 7	18 0	18 0	17 0	18 4
Derby ..	12 0	—	12 0	13 9	—	16 6	16 0	17 6	18 8
Durham ..	12 0	11 0	14 3	16 2	20 6	17 9	—	18 0	20 0
Lancashire ..	—	13 6	—	14 8	15 7	17 6	18 0	19 0	18 10
Northumberland ..	12 0	11 0	14 0	15 8	19 2	16 6	17 0	17 0	19 4
Stafford ..	12 0	9 6	12 6	13 0	14 6	13 6	16 0	15 0	15 11
Westmorland ..	12 0	—	14 3	16 4	19 6	18 0	—	17 0	18 4
Yorkshire—									
North Riding ..	12 0	11 0	13 6	15 10	16 9	16 6	15 6	16 0	16 11
West Riding ..	12 0	14 0	13 6	15 4	15 6	16 6	16 0	16 0	16 11
Average ..	12 1	11 10	13 5	15 0	17 4	16 9	16 5	16 11	18 0

# VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS

## APPENDIX II

These Tables are taken from *Report of the Committee on Financial Results of the Occupation of Agricultural Land and the Cost of Living of Rural Workers* (Cd. 76, 1919), and *The London Gazette*, No. 31343, May 16, 1919.

### RATES OF CASH WAGES OF ORDINARY AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS, 1907-17, AND MINIMUM RATES, 1918-19.

ENGLAND.

*Winter Rates.*

County.	Board of Trade Enquiry.	Board of Agriculture Investigators' Reports.		Minimum Rates, <sup>1</sup> (21 Years and Over).	
		1914.	1917.	1918.	1919.
Bedford	s. d.	14s. to 16s.	18s. to 21s.	s.	s. d.
Berks ..	13 9	12s. to 13s.	15s. to 16s.	30	36 6
Buckingham	13 8	13s. to 15s.	18s. to 26s.	30	36 6
Cambridge	14 9	13s. to 16s.	18s. to 27s.	30	36 6
Cheshire	13 2	20s. to 22s.	25s. to 27s.	30	36 6
Cornwall	17 2	—	—	36	38 0
Cumberland	15 0	—	—	31	37 6
Derby ..	18 4	16s. to 21s.	23s. to 30s.	35	35 0
Devon	18 8	12s. to 18s.	15s. 6d. to 22s.	31	37 6
Dorset	14 6	13s. to 14s.	18s. to 19s.	31	37 6
Durham	12 1	21s. to 25s.	—	30	36 6
Essex ..	—	14s. to 22s.	20s. to 26s.	36	42 6
	13 7			32	38 6

# A P P E N D I X I I

Hants ..	..	14 0	14s.	20s.	31	37 6
Hereford	..	13 11	13s. 6d. to 15s. 6d.	18s. to 21s. 6d.	31	36 6
Hertford	..	14 9	14s. to 16s.	20s. to 23s.	32	38 6
Huntingdon	..	13 4	15s.	21s. to 23s.	30	36 6
Kent ..	..	16 2	16s. to 20s.	25s. to 28s.	33	39 6
Lancaster	..	19 4	18s. to 25s.	24s. to 35s.	35	39 6
Leicester	..	16 7	16s.	25s.	31	37 6
Lincoln	..	15 4	15s. to 18s.	22s. to 30s.	34	40 6
Middlesex	..	18 0	20s. to 25s.	27s. to 33s.	34	40 6
Norfolk	..	12 6	12s. to 15s.	22s. to 25s.	30	36 6
Northampton	..	14 5	14s. to 18s.	16s. to 26s.	30	36 6
Northumberland	..	—	—	32s. to 34s.	36	42 6
Nottingham	..	17 2	16s. to 26s.	26s.	35	38 0
Oxford	..	12 11	12s. to 19s.	16s. to 21s.	30	36 6
Rutland	..	14 10	15s. 6d.	22s. 6d.	31	37 6
Salop ..	..	15 2	15s. to 16s.	20s. 6d. to 23s.	33	37 0
Somerset	..	14 0	12s. to 19s.	14s. to 26s.	30	36 6
Stafford	..	16 3	15s.	23s.	35	38 6
Suffolk	..	12 5	13s. to 15s.	20s. to 22s.	30	36 6
Surrey	..	16 8	15s. to 20s.	20s. to 24s.	33	39 6
Sussex	..	15 1	13s. to 17s.	22s.	32	38 6
Warwick	..	15 4	13s. to 18s.	20s. to 22s.	30	36 6
Westmorland	..	19 2	18s. to 30s.	24s. to 30s.	35	35 0
Wilts ..	..	13 0	13s. to 14s.	19s. to 20s.	30	36 6
Worcester	..	14 5	12s. to 18s.	16s. to 26s.	30	36 6
Yorks ..	..	17 6	18s. to 21s.	24s. to 35s.	35	41 0

<sup>1</sup> The *Minimum Rates* for 1918-19 include the values of certain "allowances"; therefore these rates are not strictly comparable with Cash Wages 1907-1917.

# VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS

## APPENDIX II—continued:

### Summer Rates.

County.	Board of Trade Enquiry.	Board of Agriculture Investigators' Reports.		Minimum Rates <sup>1</sup> (21 Years and Over).	
		1914.	1917.	1918.	1919.
Bedford	..	s. d. 13 10	14s. to 18s.	s. 30	s. d. 36 6
Berks ..	..	13 9	14s. to 15s.	30	36 6
Buckingham	..	14 11	13s. to 20s.	30	36 6
Cambridge	..	13 3	13s. to 16s.	30	36 6
Cheshire	..	17 2	24s.	36	38 0
Cornwall	..	15 0	—	31	37 6
Cumberland	..	18 4	—	35	35 0
Derby ..	..	18 8	16s. to 21s.	31	37 6
Devon	..	14 6	11s. to 17s. 6d.	31	37 6
Dorset	..	12 1	13s. to 14s.	30	36 6
Durham	..	—	21s. to 25s.	36	42 6
Essex ..	..	13 7	14s. to 22s.	32	38 6
Gloucester	..	14 0	12s. to 20s.	30	36 6
Hampshire	..	14 1	14s. to 15s. 6d.	31	37 6
Hereford	..	14 0	13s. 6d. to 15s. 6d.	31	36 6
Hertford	..	14 9	14s. to 16s.	32	38 6
			25s.		
			18s. to 21s. 6d.		
			20s.		
			18s. to 26s.		
			25s. to 27s.		
			19s. to 20s.		
			16s. 6d. to 23s.		
			25s. to 30s.		
			30s. to 33s.		
			20s. to 30s.		
			18s. to 28s.		
			17s. to 18s.		
			22s. 6d. to 25s.		

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Huntingdon ..	..	13	6	15s.	24s. to 25s.	30	36
Kent ..	..	16	5	17s. 6d. to 27s.	25s. to 28s.	33	39
Lancashire ..	..	19	5	—	—	35	39
Leicester ..	..	16	8	16s.	25s.	31	37
Lincoln ..	..	15	4	16s. 6d. to 18s.	25s. to 30s.	34	40
Middlesex ..	..	19	0	20s. to 25s.	27s. to 33s.	34	40
Norfolk ..	..	12	8	14s. to 18s.	25s.	30	36
Northants ..	..	14	6	14s. to 20s.	20s. to 27s.	30	36
Northumberland ..	..	—	—	—	32s. to 34s.	36	42
Nottingham ..	..	17	2	16s.	26s.	35	38
Oxford ..	..	13	0	12s. to 19s.	17s. to 25s.	30	36
Rutland ..	..	14	10	15s. 6d.	25s.	31	37
Salop ..	..	15	2	15s. to 16s.	20s. 6d. to 23s.	33	37
Somerset ..	..	14	1	—	—	30	36
Stafford ..	..	16	4	15s.	24s.	35	38
Suffolk ..	..	12	6	14s. to 15s.	22s. to 24s.	30	36
Surrey ..	..	16	8	15s. to 20s.	21s. to 25s.	33	39
Sussex ..	..	15	1	13s. to 17s.	22s.	32	38
Warwick ..	..	15	5	13s. to 18s.	22s. to 25s.	30	36
Westmorland ..	..	19	2	18s. to 30s.	24s. to 30s.	35	35
Wilts ..	..	13	0	13s. to 14s.	20s.	30	36
Worcester ..	..	14	6	12s. to 18s.	16s. to 26s.	30	36
Yorks ..	..	17	7	18s. to 21s.	18s. to 21s.	35	41

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\* The *Minimum Rates* for 1918-19 include the values of certain "allowances"; therefore these rates are not strictly comparable with Cash Wages 1907-1917.

# VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS

## APPENDIX III.—COST OF LIVING.

These Tables are taken from *Report of the Committee on Financial Results of the Occupation of Agricultural Land and the Cost of Living of Rural Workers* (Cd. 76, 1919).

TABLE I.—*Dietary of Farm Workers' Family in 1902, with Estimated Cost in 1902 and 1912.*

Articles.	Unit.	Average Dietary of Agricultural Labourer's family (6 persons) in England, 1902.	1902. <sup>1</sup>		1912.	
			Unit Price.	Approximate Cost.	Unit Price.	Approximate Cost.
Beef or Mutton ..	lb.	Pounds. 3·35	s. d. 0 7½	Pence. 24·43	s. d. 0 8	Pence. 26·85
Pork ..	lb.	1·10	0 8	8·80	0 8½	9·42
Bacon ..	lb.	2·70	0 6	16·20	0 10	27·00
Cheese ..	lb.	1·20	0 6½	7·80	0 8	9·61
Bread ..	Loaf, 4 lb.	19·50	0 4½	21·93	0 5½	26·81
Flour ..	14 lb.	14·87	1 5½	18·58	1 8	21·24
Oatmeal and Rice ..	lb.	1·25	0 2	2·50	0 2	2·50
Potatoes ..	14 lb.	25·75	0 6	11·07	0 7	12·87
Tea ..	lb.	0·46	1 4	7·36	1 4	7·50
Coffee or Cocoa ..	lb.	0·15	0 11½	1·85	1 0	1·87
Butter ..	lb.	1·04	1 2	14·65	1 2	14·65
Lard, Margarine, Dripping ..	lb.	1·03	0 6	6·18	0 7	7·21
Sugar ..	lb.	4·31	0 2	8·62	0 2	8·62
Syrup, Treacle, Jam ..	lb.	1·61	0 4	6·44	0 4½	7·69
Milk, New or ..	pint	4½ (pints)	0 1½	(6·75)	0 1½	6·75
" Skimmed ..	pint	8½ "	0 0½	4·37	0 0½	(4·37) <sup>2</sup>
Total value ..	—	13s. 6½d.	—	13· 5½	—	15s. 10½d.



# A P P E N D I X      I I I

## TABLE II.

Allowing for certain changes in consumption between 1902 and 1912, the Committee estimated that cost of revised dietary, October 1912, would be 13s. 6d. as compared with 13s. 5½d. in 1902.

*Estimated Expenditure of a Farm Worker's Family.*

(6 Persons.)

	1902.					1912-14.				
	s.	d.				s.	d.			
Food .. .. .	13	5½	..	..	..	15	6	..	..	..
Rent .. .. .	1	6	..	..	..	1	6	..	..	..
Fuel and Light .. .. .	1	9	..	..	..	1	9	..	..	..
Clothes .. .. .	3	0	..	..	..	3	0	..	..	..
Clubs and Insurances .. .. .	—	6	..	..	1.	—	9	..	..	..
Total .. .. .	20	2½	..	..	..	22	6	..	..	..
Increase .. .. .	100		..	..	..	111.0		..	..	..

## TABLE III.

*Expenditure of Farm Workers' Families in 1918, and Increase on Estimated Expenditure in 1914.*

	Estimated Expenditure, 1914 (Pre-war).		Expenditure of 396 Families, March-June, 1918.	
	s.	d.	s.	d.
Food (Principal Items)	..	..	28	11½
("Other Foods")	..	..	2	1
Rent .. ..	..	..	2	1
Fuel and Light	..	..	4	1½
Clothes .. ..	..	..	6	8
Insurances	..	..	1	6
Cleaning Materials	..	..	1	0½
Total .. ..	25	2½	46	5½

The average number of persons in the families in 1918 is about 5½, and the amount of expenditure per head only 8s. 6d. The estimated increase in the expenditure between 1914 and 1918 is 85 per cent.

### INCREASE IN COST OF FOOD, MARCH-JUNE, 1918, TO JANUARY 1, 1919.

The Committee adds the following note: "The prices of bread, flour and margarine have remained stable, but considerable increases in prices of meat, cheese and new milk have occurred. On the basis of quantities of food recorded in the budgets, the increase in the cost of food from March-June, 1918, to January 1st, 1919, is nearly 2s. per week, which will bring up the increase in expenditure since 1914 to 93 per cent."

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